

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

So That I May Be In Them

Today the readings begin with life being knocked out of someone, and end with a prayer that life be put into someone. Death and Resurrection – the Easter mystery.

Fifty Days

Next Sunday we reach the full tally of fifty days of Paschaltide – in Greek *Pentecost*, which is the Jewish feast of the Law. We celebrate Easter every day of this season, and at the end we have a clearer idea of the meaning of the Resurrection than we did when the cycle began, on Ash Wednesday. I was noticing last week, when the sun came to shine on us, how perfect the trees were; for a brief moment each year there comes a state of glory – blossom-time – when dead wood suddenly bursts into a beauty that shocks us (the one *certain* remark every Spring is; *I don't think I've ever seen such beautiful blossom!*). Then come the gold and green leaves, and the copper beeches turn dark, and the spiky branches fill out into the rich, mysterious, living architecture of high summer, with its spires and canopies of colour, light and shade. So with the Church: the trauma of the Cross meets the sudden, impossible flowering of Easter, and then the Paschal season clothes the Church in all its members, with a panoply of variety, colours, shapes, sizes, patterns, and forms, coming to life individually, and in relation to others, and in one huge chorus of fruitfulness: *completi sunt dies Pentecostae*, the days of Pentecost are fulfilled, and with them the Church is filled to overflowing with the life of the Spirit.

Making Known The Father's Name

Jesus speaks in his final prayer to the Father of *making known to us the Father's name*. This is what Jesus does in sending us the Holy Spirit. The Son goes to the Cross because of his obedience to the Father, and we look on and see this obedience: *we saw his glory, as the only Son of the Father*. It is one thing to watch the giving of another's life, and another thing to share the Spirit that makes him do it. We don't receive the Spirit simply to make us understand, but to make us *share* this loving relationship towards the Father. *Whoever believes in me will perform the same works as me: and even greater works, because I am going to the Father*. These words of Jesus seem to set the stage for the deeds of the saints, for the story of the Church, and for the story all of us are writing

in the humility of our own lives. What is granted to us is to reproduce the pattern of the death and resurrection of Jesus, in our own accent, and our own shape and time. The mystery remains one, and makes all of us one; but its form is multiplied and variegated, so that the vigour of the one true vine may be seconded by the splendour of the whole forest, alive with the life of the risen Christ.

The Witness Of Martyrs

The martyrs tell us what Paul knew: *I think that all my previous gifts are so much rubbish if only I can have a share in Christ*. They provide us with a vivid source of light, as we tread the darker paths of our suffering and loss. We are constantly passing over the bridge which leads to life. We need to be fed with the true bread, of life which does not pass away, day by day. In this feeding we accept the passing of that other life, which (face it) is doomed, and terminally ill, and actually shortening as you read these words. The Eucharist remains the bread of eternity, not the bread of the dying world. If, as we receive it, we are filled with the sense of what is passing, as Stephen was at his martyrdom, then we can let the Spirit speak in us. It is ironic that those who carry out a stoning are called "witnesses". They bear witness to the fact that the victim is no longer part of the community. Stephen bears witness to the community to which he does belong, and commends his life to its leader. This is the fulfilment of Easter.
Fr Philip