

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

## Calling A Fisherman

If ever you are in Peterborough (a city whose re-modelling in recent years you may find hard to admire) refresh yourself by entering the beautiful Norman cathedral, and make your way to the very end of the north aisle (there's some top-flight fan-vaulting round the east end). There you will find a surprising modern sculpture of St Peter. It isn't the gnarled, musclebound Apostle of the movies, or the adopted imperial statue of the Vatican basilica, or the deeply-lined penitent of the foot of the Cross. It's a young man, ready to plunge into the water, but testing it out rather warily with his toe. He is not wearing the statutory robes, but stripped for action.

### The Perils Of Art

We've got wonderful art from the Christian past. But we do need to be liberated from it as often as we can (remembering that first commandment against the making of images). It may be a bit hard to get behind the images of Peter called for by the Popes, to the likely image of the man in the Gospels. Think how he must surely have been a young man, to have responded so freely to Jesus. I think of him newly-married, and not yet so grizzled that he couldn't be overwhelmed by his meeting with the Lord. I spend a lot of effort trying to prevent the limitation of Jesus – by myself, or by others – to good humanity. The real Jesus is God and man. But it's good also to release the saints from their stained glass, oil-paint, and cast bronze *inhumanity*: they are as really human as we are, and their holy deeds must shine as the costly, creative responses they are.

### My Boat, His Pulpit

I have probably bored you by drawing to your attention the fact that Luke puts this story of the Miraculous Draught of Fish at the beginning of Peter's story with Jesus, and John reserves it for the very end, for the last encounter. Luke's Jesus is the rabbi setting out on his earthly ministry. John's is the risen Christ, who has announced from the Cross his final accomplishment of the Father's will. In one sense the two treatments of the story are totally different. Yet they share a likeness that is foxing to the scholar: in John, the draught of fishes results in Peter's "repentance", when Jesus asks for his love three times (once for each of the denials, before the cock crowed). And in Luke, Peter's response to the fishes is *Leave me Lord, I am a sinful man*. The second similarity is

even more surprising: in Luke, the story frames the call of Peter to the apostolate, which makes much more sense of his "leaving everything to follow Jesus"; after all, Jesus is showing himself a better fisherman than Peter is, and assuring him that his fishing skills will be put to new use. When John has finished this story, Jesus and Peter find themselves talking about the way in which Peter's *death* would give glory to God; and his last words to Peter are, *Follow Me*. Thus we have a curious mingling of the beginning and the end of the Gospel, both of which point to the joint mysteries of *apostolate* and *martyrdom*.

### Ever Old And Ever New

When Jesus says that *only little children can enter the Kingdom*, he reminds us that the Peter who left his boat behind at the beginning is the same as the one who left his boat *to come to Jesus across the water*, and who left his boat to swim to the shore and reach the risen Lord. The Gospels move the story about, but the theme is the same. We should never think that we have finished responding to the Gospel. *Here we are again*, we sometimes feel, *reading the same stories, marking the same feasts and seasons*. But every year is a year of grace, every day a moment of encounter with Christ. It is very unlikely indeed that any day will only be this because on this day we happened to go to Church, to spend a little time on prayer, or to receive the sacraments. You'd expect days like that to have some smack of holiness about them. But it wasn't a Sabbath-day when Jesus came to the seashore; the men were all at work. And it probably won't be in church, on a Sunday, at the moment of holy communion, that Jesus will suddenly call on us to make our response to him. The incarnation placed our meeting with God in the most unlikely place - Galilee - and unmarked by any visible glory. People found Jesus to be their brother, so familiar they could hardly hear his message. And it is when we are sitting in an unblest and weary boat, that Christ draws near.

*Fr Philip*

