

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Love Your Enemies

This is probably the place where we find the Gospel digging deepest into our inadequacies. We always hope that we shall find those we are bound to love worthy, *in some way*, so that the milk of human kindness will flow easily from us, unforced, sincere, honest and natural. Well, it's nice to imagine it might go that way. But that would unfortunately come under the disparaged category of "love reserved for your brother", of which Jesus said: *Even sinners do as much, do they not? But you must be compassionate, as your heavenly Father is compassionate.*

Becoming Like God

It seems that our likeness to God the Father is the real value at stake. When love comes naturally to us, we think we are like God who is love. But perhaps we are too ready to compliment ourselves. When we are filled with warm feelings, and good-will, and happiness with those around us, might it not be the case that we are simply and quite happily selfish? Isn't it easy to imagine ourselves clapping the shutters over in the Via Dolorosa, as Jesus passes by carrying the sins of the world, unconcerned by the closeness of the Lamb of God? We may acquit ourselves, but the Last Judgment is full of people who never realised that they were leaving Christ uncared-for and unloved, complacent in the consolations they were receiving in this life.

God, by contrast, is *kind to the ungrateful and the wicked*. At first we may say (still complacent): *so I've noticed*. But it is because of this quality in the Father that *we* are still alive, and not consigned to the eternal scrapyard. So it is a paradox that we can only start to resemble God when we realise the sinfulness in us, and begin to search for a new depth of generosity which flows from his love for us, not from whatever store of decency we possess in ourselves. *We are to love*, says John, *because He loved us first*. This is so centrally important, and so easy to ignore; again and again we find ourselves scraping our barrel for some graceless irk whom we find completely lacking in sympathy or charm. We know we can't even like them, and we think our path is barred. That is the moment when John's tiny phrase must kick in to our equation. It will always turn the balance, can't fail.

David And Saul

I suppose we have long since abandoned the hope that worldly power can be exercised with any kind

of purity. *Power tends to corrupt*, says Lord Acton, and few things ring so true in modern ears. So look at David learning the lesson of his darkest hour, in today's reading. It is one thing for the poor, helpless and insignificant to accept their lot: it may be their sanctification. But for David, gifted, personally powerful, and destined for greatness, it is something else: it is the rich man entering through the eye of the needle, the work of pure grace from God, *for whom nothing is impossible*. David is being persecuted, he has right on his side, he is unjustly threatened with death. Yet he finds the grace to spare Saul *because he is the Lord's anointed*; he draws from God the grace to behave with astonishing magnanimity. That Saul still cannot respond with similar greatness of spirit is the sign that he is lost.

The Love Of God

In order for a similar grace to live in us, we must stop thinking about the impossibility of forgiveness, the heavy burden of fidelity, the sacrificial cost of the commandments – in other words, our limited selves – and start thinking about the way God deals with us: *we are to love because he loved us first....* we are to forgive because he forgave us first: we are to be faithful because he is faithful to us, and so forth. This gearing of our being to the generosity of God is not to be done in a moment, but is the work of constant and devoted attention, a sustained choice of God as our measure of goodness. *Fr Philip*