

## THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

### Simon Peter, Do You Love Me?

It's no ordinary question, and its very strangeness reveals great things about Jesus. He asks of us something no-one else does, a kind of devotion and commitment that puts all others into the second division. He does this, not because he is possessive, or enjoys dominating people, but because he is the Son of God, the one hope for us to survive death and save our lives.

#### The Other Gospels

The question above comes in John 21. Today's Gospel is the celebrated "hinge" in all the other three Gospels, the moment where Jesus seems to think: *Now they have seen enough, they know enough, to make a decision.* It was Peter who responded; and that Peter should lead the other disciples in the expression of faith is what we express in the Papacy. John Paul II has had amongst us the rôle Peter fills in today's Gospel: to speak up, and to say what the others are only beginning to believe.

#### Part Of The Story

Of course, Peter, at this stage, only knows part of the story. He calls Jesus "the Christ of God" because he has seen miracles and heard the authority of Jesus' teaching. He has not seen the Cross, or even heard of it, until this very moment. The decision about whether to accept Jesus totally will not be put to him until the Passion begins. So the fair-weather profession of faith we hear from him today is only partially valid. It will need renewal and re-enforcement in the future; and Peter will stumble badly before he makes good his own witness to Christ. This illuminates the word (only in Luke) *daily*: Jesus says: *if anyone wants to be my disciple, let him renounce himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.* He isn't just saying that it will be a long job, that it will take endurance. He is saying that every day will require its own new commitment, as new things are asked of us. Disciples don't make a single gesture, but enter into a lifelong relationship, until the day comes when (like Peter) they meet the challenge of the martyr, the call to lay down life itself.

#### Lay Down Your Life For Me?

At the Last Supper Peter said he was ready to do this for Jesus: but it was not in the context of the Cross. Peter wanted to do it in *battle*. This *Cross* business was something he could never get his

mind round. His secret plan to save Jesus from the Cross is at once the most endearing thing about Peter, and the root of all his misunderstanding. He reminds you of all those simple people who have interfered with the great artists, authors, and scientists of the world *for their own good*. I think of the genius of the Jesuit spiritual director who forbade the novice Gerard Manley Hopkins to write poetry, or the kind cleaning-lady who threw away some author's manuscript because he was worrying about it too much. Jesus could call Peter *stumbling-block* and *foundation-stone* at the same time; he was already the right material, but not yet being firmly-fixed, still a danger to the unwary.

#### Silenced Disciples

*Jesus gave them strict orders not to tell anyone anything about this.* Increasingly since the Reformation, people have felt freer and freer about speaking of Jesus. Thomas More was so anxious about the purity of the Gospel that he took a full and active part in censorship, restriction of printed editions of the Bible, and silencing of heretical opinions. For so humane a father and so fine a scholar to have behaved thus is hard for us to understand. But we don't have to accept the burnings and butcherings of the sixteenth century to share with St Thomas the zeal that the *true* Christ should be proclaimed. The silencing of the Twelve – even when they had discerned that in Jesus the Messiah was with them – should alert us to the need to be disciples daily, before we can be evangelists.

*Fr Philip*