

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

What Jesus Said About Us

Today's Gospel is a curious collection of sayings. There's a great feeling of resolution as Jesus turns to face Jerusalem and the last lap of his journey to glory. How do we/his disciples respond?

Do You Want Us To Set Fire To Them?

The Spanish Inquisition, seemingly, never posed this question to Jesus, or studied the answer it evoked (*he turned and rebuked them*). Jesus did not want a ministry which included coercion or vengefulness. It was his special approach to evil which ruled out such responses. The one who looked toward the Cross as his vocation and future could hardly endorse a programme of violence. When Jesus saw evil, his first response was to *go and pick it up*: to shoulder the suffering of it, to absorb it, to mop it up. *He carried our disease for us, he bore our sickness away; he is the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world*; and surely he loved the lines of Isaiah, *Ours were the sufferings he bore, ours the sorrows he carried...he was pierced through for our faults, crushed for our sins; on him lies the punishment which brings us peace, and through his wounds we are healed*. This reminds me of the story of a man who arrived in hell. His friends came to plead with the devil to let him out. His employer said how useful he'd been, but was not allowed to see him. His parish priest said he'd been an asset, but it cut no ice. Lastly his mother arrived. *Open up*, she commanded, *you've got my son*. The devil was adamant. *He's not going anywhere*. The woman was unruffled. *So I'm coming in*, she retorted. That is Christ's response: pick up damaged, diminished humanity, put it on your own mount, take it to the inn and leave enough money to pay for its care, with the promise of a return visit to settle the whole account.

Foxes Have Holes

I worry about this homeless remark of our Lord's, because I find I have a great need to have a home, in earthly terms. I once swapped life in a house of my own for a single room in someone else's, and my belongings all went into storage. After six months I was getting really negative, as if I had lost my bearings and starting-point. I think I was feeling homeless. Without a place to call home I was anxious and preoccupied, and found it hard to get involved. Home is one of those things, like money, security, friendship or popularity: if you've got them, you can forget about them. If

you haven't got them, you can think of nothing else. Jesus seems to have had a home in Capernaum, at least for a time; but he also knew the life of a pilgrim, as he travelled from town to town. He knew what it was like to be rejected and unwelcome, and in his death he became a condemned person. Yet he lost everything in this world in the name of his home with the Father: the sharing they know is the home we all long for, the ultimate in belonging. Having that, you could indeed spare the task of finding an earthly home: he had nowhere to lay his head, but he had the freedom to lay down his life because of his place in the Father.

The Old Folks At Home

One of the most comforting parts of our faith is the way in which our earthly relationships are confirmed and guaranteed in eternity. The good Shepherd never loses any of his sheep. Those we have loved we shall meet again in the Lord. Jesus freely left behind the prospects of an earthly family, knowing that he had brothers and sisters and mothers in the community of faith, and all who believe in Christ should have the same confidence and freedom in him about their own families and communities. If our anxieties are so radically resolved, then even the solemn business of burying the dead is only a stage on the way. We should meditate carefully on the freedom to which we are called, and try to live in it.
Fr Philip