

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Do I Make Myself Clear?

Usually a testy question from someone asserting authority: but maybe it could be a humbler question we ask ourselves.

Clarity

We think *clarity* is about thought or words. But there is a clarity of life which underlies clear thinking or speaking: it grows from the power to see things for what they are, and to grasp their relationships to all that is. (I can see at once that this sort of clarity belongs to God, who knows the falling of sparrows and the number of hairs on our head.) It's great wisdom if we remember everything that is in our power and our care, and if we know the correct importance of each part, and if we know the whole picture of our life as a single reality. This would be real integrity: we would, as we say, have got our act together.

The Mess Of Reality

The truth is usually far short of this. I fail constantly to remember my duty or my possibilities. I miss opportunities, I drop catches, and stitches, every hour. Now and again I surprise myself - and others - by managing to do something graceful and generous, but this only points up my regular state; preoccupied, choked up with concerns that have grown out of all proportion, I broodingly empty the baby out with the bathwater, and finish the day with very little profit. The worst thing is that I have made very little sense of myself, and people cannot read in me the faith, hope and love which open the door to God. Am I making myself clear? Not very.

“Joyfully Take Courage.”

The Book of Wisdom today speaks of the Israelites at the moment of the Exodus – the night of Passover. Putting their trust in the oaths of God, they submit to his plan, which involves the extinction of their enemies and their own setting out for the land of the promises. The two facts are one: a single act of God accomplishes the saving of the virtuous *and* the ruin of their enemies. Here is integrity. Wisdom is teaching us something very important about ourselves: God's loving plan for us involves the defeat of what harms us. Our problem is that, in the weakness of our faith, we still cling to our sins, to all the short-cuts and fudges we use to prop our crumbling house. There is our lack of clarity, our compromised life, our hedged bets. The voice of Jesus returns to us: *No-*

one can serve two masters. If we cling to the security of slaves, the freedom of pilgrims will remain an impossible dream.

Servants Waiting

Compare the imagery of the Gospel today: the Christian is sold up in the world, and has already distributed his earthly inheritance. There's the clarity of a Francis of Assisi. The payoff – treasure in heaven – comes at the same moment. There is the integrity of the Exodus. Christians have their eyes on the road, waiting for the Master's return. Their own rest unimportant, their senses are tuned for the sound of his arrival, whatever the time when it will break the silence. There's the clarity. The return of the Master brings the reward: he will sit us down and serve us at the table (the echo of the Last Supper points us directly to the Eucharist, which is already here). And to close the Gospel, Jesus gives us the alternative: the servant who has forgotten, who has got bogged down, in whose life no service can be read. He too will have his encounter, when the Light of the world will expose his lack of integrity. That is an awesome thought: the moment when a single light will shine for all, and the single Truth will put all things into their context. Then our self-deceptions and falsity will be uncharacteristically clear. Clarity then will not be on our side. Might this picture of judgment not spur us on to seek integrity now?

Fr Philip