

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

All Your Possessions

You cannot be my disciple unless you give up all of your possessions. The simplest child, hearing me read today's Gospel, will be able to detect the distance between me and the Lord. There's no-one in Church today who is without some significant possessions, I guess, just as there is no-one who is perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect, or who loves our neighbour as Christ loves us. How do we live with *this* particular tension?

The Charm Of Collecting

We are sometimes awfully sophisticated about possessions, sometimes endearingly simple. The dealers who now sell ancient *postage-stamps* in panelled chambers seem to me to exemplify sophistication. Their wares have no value but rarity; for thousands of pounds to change hands for intrinsically worthless Victorian bits of sticky paper *because the print was faulty* must surely rank as one of our more ridiculous absurdities. Compare the figure of the shivering, obsessive trainspotter who used to adorn station platforms and railway bridges. He seems to me to embody a harmlessness and a spirit of play, almost deliberately absurd: costing nothing and spending only time, only acquisitive in the simplest sense.

Ministatement

We heard, the other week, that 50% of us can quote our bank-balances to within £10, one in four to the last penny at any time. One in 10 checks the balance *four times a day*. Very interesting! When churches were more open than they habitually are today, we used to know people who made a little visit several times a day. The result was certainly great holiness, and a great facility with prayer, the fruit of constant practice. The visit to the cash-machine to check on the bank balance shows a very similar devotion, perhaps a similar search. Does it appear to you to be a sophisticated form of religion? Or a terrifyingly crude one? We use the word *miser* as a term of contempt for someone obsessed with his possessions. The Latin word actually means *wretched*. Our English word tells us that we know of the trap possessions can be to us, and that we despise it; but that cash-machine tells a different story. As a nation we are hanging around our financial details with a "devotion" that is revealing. *You, however, must look for heavenly things, not for the things on the earth; because you have died, and now the life you have is*

hidden with God in Christ. More intimately: *Get yourself a purse that will not rot, treasure that will not fail you...for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.* Wretchedness is a pretty clear word for the treasuring of rubbish, the setting of our central hopes on a sinking ship. Behind it lies our lack of faith in God's promises, in which we *say* we trust, while still reserving the right to pay our respects to our Golden Calf. It is not that we *want* to worship so inferior a power. It is just that we are led to do so, by the poverty of our gift of self to the true God, by our enslavement to the engines of economic structures. Of what use would *heavenly things* be to boardroom battlers, entrepreneurs, doers of deals in the Stock Market? God might liberate them from their enslavement, their pointless search for value in their trade. But the sacrifice they would need to make would be great.

When We Should Hate

The only thing we should hate is the power of evil. Once we have known the evil that afflicts us, we must learn a kind of hatred that allows us to turn from it, to be made free. But as with Israel in Egypt, a great question for Moses was, *Do they want to be delivered?* Exodus says: *They would not listen to Moses, so crushed was their spirit, so cruel their enslavement.* The kingdom must begin to be built in us, before we come to know, and choose, the treasure that can safely, worthily possess our hearts, and in which true joy is to be found.

Fr Philip