

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

## Hating and Creating

“If you had hated anything, you would never have created it.” So says the book of Wisdom today, and we would do well to pay attention; because we habitually despise bits of the Creation, especially ourselves. There’s a strong likelihood that much of our wrongdoing stems from self-hatred; we’re frightened to leave others their life and independence, because we are afraid that we should ourselves be found wanting. Perhaps those who violate others are getting in first, as it were, because they feel they deserve punishment themselves. Certainly there is a close relationship between creativity and love, in that God is love, and is the only true Creator. What, though, are we to do in a creation that is partly possessed, partly powered, by hatred? All around us there are movements which use the power of hatred, along with fear, greed, selfishness and the other vices; and they are often so successful that ideas like love, mercy, compassion, truthfulness, communion, and even creation itself are treated as pious fictions, wishful thinking for the feeble-minded. Is it true? Is our faith a kindly fable for the bewildered losers who can’t cope with the rough world as it really is?

### We Live In A Different World

Believing what Christians do makes the world truly a different place. The realism of our beliefs does that. Even if the world is full of lies, one truthful person makes the world different. Therefore we hold vital – life-giving - gifts for the world. We choose to live in this different way, and in that sense we remake the world for others. Every time we contradict or disobey the world’s rules, we make the evil world less real, and the saved world realer. Or to put it another way, we enable the Kingdom to come. Or we turn the orphaned, lost world back into a Creation that reflects its Maker. This is what Jesus does for Zacchaeus in today’s Gospel. He drives a coach-and-horses through the world Zacchaeus had come to inhabit, and with all his might he pulls the despised tax-gatherer back into the human family. The response is dramatic and sudden: Zacchaeus takes the gift with both hands, and vows to live in such a new world himself. He will give half his property to the poor, and with the rest he will make generous restitution for all his past extortions. This classic rush of generosity is not unrealistic. It’s frequently found that those who have been frozen out from human community

have within them extraordinary powers of love and kindness. It is rare for goodness not to evoke some sort of goodness in response, just as it is rare for hostility not to evoke hostility. Jesus breaks the vicious circle, and Zacchaeus responds gratefully: *Yes, it is true: I am, unrecognised, a human being.* Down he comes, out of his tree, and with him the gifts begin to appear.

### Why Should I?

Why should I be the one to take the initiative? Not, surely, because of my saintliness, or my greater store of virtues, or my desire to do the right thing (a worthy, sturdy attitude, that, but not the point). I should be the one to break the circle of evil because I believe that God has done it first, and that my task is to live in the world where the battle is actually over and done with, already fought and won. Not only will this take me a great act of faith, but it will put my life on side with Christ’s life, and I can expect the same things to show in my life as showed in his. There will be wonder, but terror too.

### Giving Life To Others

Our breaking of the circle is just as vital for the people we live with as Jesus’ was for Zacchaeus. We have to be constantly offering a new start, constantly opening the door to life for those who have been shut out. It may be that they will not get the point, or that they will take advantage of us, or that they will refuse the invitation. God has long experience of those responses. But it may be that, with gratitude, someone will be moved to make a new covenant with life, as Zacchaeus did. Then we will have done a Christian deed. It’s very important to remember that good deeds are not just ours, to think up, to engineer, and to pay for. They are God’s deeds first of all. Our sins are permitted by God. But our good deeds carry his power and grace. If we find ourselves swimming against the world’s tide, he will never let us be defeated by it. The Saviour will use all the room we give him to make salvation come to this house.

*Fr Philip*