

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

We Believe In The Resurrection

We are often told to proclaim our faith. We don't just do that when we say the Creed at Mass, or tell someone: *I'm a Christian*. We do it when we take action that can't be understood *except* as an act of faith. Jesus' trust in God was shown in all sorts of deeds, but the climax of all of these deeds was his acceptance of the Cross. I imagine most people hope that their death will be the *least* impressive of all the facts of their life. They show this when they distance themselves from knowledge of death. Many are so frightened that they dare not look on a corpse (*"I'd rather remember him as he was,"* they murmur.) That implies that the really important things are the business we transact, the relationships we enjoy, the facts of living. We can hang on to those, and forget about death, and still know the really significant truth about someone. I've always felt that death is teaching me something massive, and I've always wanted to stay until it happens, to accompany this person all the way to the awesome threshold. This is their faith's most powerful moment. It is personal, and most serious, and most eloquent. Let's not be frightened into losing it!

"The Crucified"

With Jesus it is the opposite. The really significant thing about him is his death, for which everything else is just a preparation. Nothing he *said* was all that revolutionary; we sometimes assume that his teaching about right and wrong, or his doctrine about religion, were the heart of Christ. That turns him into a world authority, but it doesn't do him justice. Much of what he said can be found in the Old Testament, and he himself learned most of it from his mother and father and his rabbi. Again, if he had wanted to found a movement based on learning, he wouldn't have chosen thick fishermen as its founding members. They did not shine as disciples, and as the shadows closed around him, Jesus knew that *they could not go with him* on the journey he had to take. This was his great act of teaching, and if we want to be his disciples we are obliged to make *our* death the theme of our biography, as he did. *If you refuse to take up your Cross and follow me, you are not worthy to be my disciple*. This amazing demand is asking us to believe in the Resurrection in a totally realistic way, and we have to find the way to proclaim this realistic faith *in our living*. A martyr's death isn't for everyone; but everyone has deeds to do that make the faith real.

For Example?

I'd suggest that faith in the Resurrection is incompatible with refusing to forgive someone who has wronged me. I can't say: *I believe in Christ's power to raise me from the dead* if I'm also saying: *I think what's-his-name is past redemption*. I would find it hard to believe that confirmed pessimism about the world can co-exist with the Easter faith. How can the acceptance of a tragic view of human beings and their community mingle with the belief that all things are hurtling towards a glorious fulfilment? These are views which, on a working basis, can easily take charge of us. We can become people who *always love to think the worst*. This makes *the faith we proclaim* one thing, and *the faith we live by* another. I'm not talking about hypocrisy; but about the contradiction in us, when our faith in the Resurrection does not liberate us from the power of death, and we live miserable, cowed lives which tremble before evil.

Adding Up

If I'm inheriting a fortune, and still mean about ha'pennies, I don't add up. If I'm living in the hope of eternity, and still get depressed by the state of the Stock Exchange or the European Community, I don't add up. The work of faith is the business of making sense, of expelling from our picture what won't harmonise with what we believe. It's a dramatic business: if we are honest, we are going to find our faith really challenged in the process. Our very sins raise the question: *Do you really believe in God's promises?* Someone once said of Christians: "For people who have nothing to fear from death, they still seem very keen not to die!" We don't have to have a death-wish to show our faith in eternal life. But we can greet death calmly when it comes into our life, refusing to panic or escape. If we refuse to despair at that moment, true hope can be born in us, not only for us, but for the world. *Fr Philip*