

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

He Judges The Wretched With Integrity

There are quite a lot of people who never come in contact with “the wretched”. They are blessed with adequate wealth, their personalities throw up few difficult features, their health gives no cause for concern, and (not surprisingly) they grow up thinking well of themselves, optimistic and positive about their future. There is usually just a slight edge on them, however, about the rest of us. They are a tad careful about whom they allow near to them, as if a sixth sense has warned them that the less fortunate are a bit of a danger to shipping.

The Right Kind Of Company

Yon Cassius hath a lean and hungry look, says poor Julius Caesar: let me have men around me that are fat. It must have been the greatest surprise when it was honest Brutus that stuck the knife in. A lot of Shakespeare is about our tragic misjudgement of the people we can or should trust. Lear mistakes his daughters: Duncan Macbeth, Macbeth Macduff; everybody mistakes Hamlet. Behind the plots of all the plays is a blazing sense of integrity, which seems to say: *Don't try to base your security on injustice.* The Gospel says something very specific: *be correct in your judgment of the poor.* Think of the times St Luke said to us, in last year's Sunday liturgies: *Watch out for the poor! Mind that beggar at the gate! Don't invite the rich and famous to your dinner! Watch out for the blind, the disabled, the orphan and the widow!* It seems there is no integrity for us, until we understand the whole gamut of human weakness, and accept it. This is why Jesus dies among thieves.

The Human Family

God gives us the whole human family as our community, and we are indifferent to any part of it at our peril. That sounds ominous for any one person; but it concerns all our relationships. We belong to any individual *because* we belong to everyone. Our friendship is part of a vaster belonging to all who live. Friendship must never become a stumbling-block or barrier, preventing us from loving the whole human family as Christ does. If we decide we've finished being open to others, that our little circle is complete, let us beware: the knock on the door we first ignore is the Lord's. *He comes when we are least expecting him.* So we must eliminate all complacency from our lives.

With The Holy Spirit And With Fire

Warmth and light are two realities we desire at this time of the year. The Holy Spirit brings us light that burns, cauterising what is infected, cleansing what is trivial and worthless, driving away darkness, destroying what is false. What survives his fire is the true, tempered, stone-built house in which all humanity can survive. John the Baptist is impatient with presumptuous, complacent attitudes that he finds in his fellow-worshippers; let's not fall into the trap of calling them *Pharisees* and looking down on them. We should be opening up our lives to the scrutiny of the Spirit, as people are honest with a trusted physician, hoping that by the combination of our symptoms and his skill we may be correctly diagnosed, effectively treated, and comprehensively healed. Our honesty is a measure of our hope and trust; only the fearful lie to their doctor.

How God Loves What He has Made!

What God is offering is my own integrity, the true fulfilment of my very life. I need not fear that the Lord who created me will not know how to fulfil me, or that He who died for me will not sufficiently love me, or that the One who dwells within me will have contempt for his dwelling-place. Our surrender of all plans and designs into God's hands *always* enhances our prospects. We *never* know better than God. We fear him, because the language of judgment frightens us to the core. But we shouldn't assume that when the Judge decrees the elimination of all that is imperfect, we shall find ourselves under sentence of death! What God loves, he never destroys. So when the Lord has *cleansed Jerusalem of the blood shed in her, with the blast of judgment and the blast of destruction*, he will come and rest over us, *shade for the day, refuge for the night.* He has not made us incapable of receiving his grace; and he will never fail to give it. We must allow that sense to unfold in us. Lord, in this new Year, make us one family. Help us to mirror your justice and love, to share your gifts with the poor.
Fr Philip