

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Coming To Believe

Last week, the woman at the well of Jacob came to faith in Jesus. This week, a blind man; next week, a dead man. *Firstly*, notice that all the candidates are wounded: the woman of Samaria a living disaster, with her five serial husbands and a “partner”. The blind man has people wondering whether he’s blind because he himself is so evil, or because sin runs in the family. Lazarus suffers from the mortal wound which unites us all. *Secondly*, there is an intimate connection between their woundedness and their coming to faith. If these people were living regular ordinary lives, *in the way we all hope and pray to lead ours*, the encounter with Christ might not have happened. *Thirdly*, each of these people is surrounded by a community of others, whose concern reinforces the hopelessness of their plights.

“It’s About Us!”

Reading the Gospel is for Christians a business of identifying the relevance of what we read. The penny won’t take long to drop in Lent. *First*, the woundedness; we have always known that *It is not the healthy who need the doctor, but the sick*; that Jesus comes not for the just, but for sinners. Does this mean the Church wants people to think themselves into illness, as so many people do today? Perish the thought! Rather the Church wants to *diagnose* the malady already present: our collaboration with sin, our propensity (regularly followed) to choose the worse option, and thus to make a road for death to enter our lives and the lives of others. The woman *is* continuously disappointed, the blind man *is* radically disabled, the dead man *is* buried. We are not in the business of inventing new forms of affliction: they are a drug on the market, and these stories are about us as we already are.

Know Yourself

Lent is a time for acknowledging our poverty – thus it is a time of fasting, in which we explore the depths of our own needs, and almsgiving, in which we acknowledge the needs of others in our community, and of prayer, in which we call upon God from the depths, learning in this way the vastness of his mercy. This is very different from the kind of life which tries to experience a constant elegant sufficiency, neither too warm nor too cold, nor too full nor too empty, nor too rich nor too poor. There’s something generously experienced about Lenten poverty: *Jesus spent*

forty days in the wilderness, and after them he was hungry.

Sharing The Experience

The Christian Community depends, for its existence, on the practice of sharing. We have to ask ourselves how we go about this. As donors to foreign parts I think we’re, by ordinary standards, reliable, sometimes impressive. There is a regular congregation of people to pray, which needs to reach out to the thousands about us who never pray, don’t know how to pray, and don’t know their need of praying. We could make a start by becoming far more communicative amongst ourselves. We need to share our burdens, as that saint discovered who prayed, *Lord, I have given you, all my time, my strength, my wealth; what more do you want?* The Lord answered, *Give me your sins.* Not the healthy, but the sick; not the just, but sinners to repentance.

Sharing Our Poverty

The Christian Church must be known and used as *a pooling of needs*. If it is to the poor that Jesus’ kingdom belongs, can we not display our qualifications to enter it? Do really poor people ever come to our community with their needs? - and I’m not just talking about the knock on the presbytery door! Do you, a Catholic, expect poor people when you come to Church, and are you ready for them? What does this mean for us? I can think of many practical possibilities: two are the beefing-up of our SVP, so that we feel competent to answer more needs in our community: and another is the rediscovery of the Sacrament of Forgiveness, so that we may share a deeper knowledge of Christ’s pardon for the sinful. The central reality of our faith is not good manners towards acquaintances, but love between brothers and sisters. You can’t replace that closeness and trust by any other value, and still be the Church of Christ. *What I command you is that you love one another, even as I have loved you. This is how people will know you are mine.*

Fr Philip