

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

I Am Opening Your Graves

These dramatic words are spoken by God through Ezekiel. He spoke them to a particular group of living people, the exiles in Babylon. In what sense do living people have a grave, that God should open it? This is a Lenten question.

There's A Place For You

Somewhere on the face of the earth there is a place where I *will* be buried. I don't know where it is yet; some people have chosen a place, but I don't know. My life, however, is moving towards that place, and in some ways it is the most significant place for me. Because it will be my last earthly destination, it is the place I was born to inherit. But it is, I believe, also the place from which I will rise from the dead. That is its true meaning. That is the grave which God will open one day.

Where I Already Lie Buried

Do you remember the ashes that were blessed, and imposed on your head, five weeks ago? *Dust you are, and to dust you will return*: not just a future dustiness, then, but a present one. During Lent, ever since Ash Wednesday, in fact, I have been thinking that I am already dead. I am too frightened to give my life. I am enslaved in many ways: and a slave is someone who is physically alive – so that he can do all kinds of servile work – and morally, socially, spiritually dead (so that he just needs feeding with fuel; he doesn't need relationship, let alone love). The identity of my master? I could make many guesses about that. If I were to say *the world, the flesh, and the devil* it would sound too dramatic. If I said *earthly powers* it would sound too distant. And I might leave out the most revealing suspicion I have: *myself*. I have about me the spirit of slavery: mean and selfish sometimes, minimal in my generosity, grudging in my forgiveness, scant in sympathy. I reckon a great part of my enslavement is my need to run my own life, to set my own goal, to save my own skin. As men and women of the 21st century, we all want to be in charge. The truth is that we have set our own goals, and that we have limited the possibilities for our lives to what *we* value and *we* appreciate; while the destiny God has for us is *beyond all our imagining*. That is where we stand to lose. I suspect that my endless need to define my own life is an effective grave, from which I need to be resurrected. If someone else loved me, I would find a new, wider definition. If God loved

me, I would find an eternal meaning. But I am in prison, and the jailer is myself, my own need to say what I am.

Only Half Alive

I heard a reflection the other day from a father who had suddenly discovered that his two very young children had disappeared from his side in a holiday resort (which none of the family had previously visited). His mind was suddenly convulsed by the realisation of the danger in which his family stood. The possibility of predatory strangers finding his children before he did, the wide variety of attractive places where they might have wandered, and the dangerous presence of the sea were racing through his mind as he frantically ran along the seafront. At last he found them - gazing at the boating-lake, *completely unconscious of having been lost!* He came to reflect on this much later, after a certain amount of fatherly fire-works; he had been living in terror for them, and they had been entirely unmoved, because they didn't know they were in danger. The father suddenly received an insight into the mind of God, who sees the danger in which we stand, without our knowing it. When Jesus says, *I have come that you may have life, and have it to the full*, we should not suppose that he wants us to carry on in the same vein as we always have. We are not living life to the full, but half in the power of death. We need rebirth, and the radical healing of our nature – we need resurrection.

Prayer From The Depths

So our prayer for life in this Lenten time can come from the depths of our ignorance, and the acknowledgment that our need for God's mercy may be an unfelt, unknown need. If God should find the way to heal us, that will teach us things we have never understood, and open us to realities unsuspected, *Things beyond the mind of mortal flesh*. We should welcome the healing hand of God in the Church, which will help us to know what is lacking in our holiness, and the distance that God travels to find us.

Fr Philip