

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Out Of The Shadows

Christmas is behind us. With the theme of the Word “who enlightens all who come into being” still ringing in our ears, we celebrated Epiphany, the manifestation of God as present in our nature. Then we greeted Jesus at his Baptism, revealed as beloved, as chosen, as Son of the Father. Now, moving into the Sundays of the Year, we find the theme of the light shining on, and beckoning us forwards, as Jesus summons his disciples to follow him.

I Can Help You

There is a moment that is vital and precious to all of us, about which I invite you to reflect. You are in trouble, big or small, and after trying to pretend it doesn't matter, and then trying to sort it out alone, a moment comes when you take it into your head to ask for help. In my experience, it is necessary, before this happens, for you to find, or at least envisage, a helper who is going to be of use. It might be a piece of household management: the need for a strange-shaped shelf or a radiator in a cold spot, or a garden you can no longer hope to manage. It might be an odd little pain that is growing in authority, a symptom that won't go away. It might be that your work is killing you, or that your life is painfully lonely and apparently pointless. To go for help is risky. The plumber may shake his head and say, *No, can't be done without a new boiler: two thousand minimum*. The doctor may look up, and say: *I'm afraid you need to see a specialist*. The acquaintance may turn away and say, *Well, that's life – same for all of us....* But the possibility is that the one we ask for help will look at us with new interest, and cancel the plans for a moment, and say: *I believe I can help you*.

You Have Made Their Gladness Great

If we call such a juncture *the moment of helpfulness*, the one which consummates all of them is the moment of Christ's coming. That works on a world scale, but it works for each individual as well: the moment when my absolute need is answered, finally and totally, is the moment when Christ comes. This belief – because we're still living in time, we can't call it a certainty – can become a powerful sustaining force, and can genuinely draw the teeth of the threatening powers we so fear. It needs to be sustained by a strong, living relationship with Christ, fed by prayer and daily trust. It is really to

this relationship that we see the fishermen called today.

What do they leave behind?

People can mistake the apostolic calling for escapism or irresponsibility. It is not about that. Nor should we think of these disciples as models of the clerical life or the monastic life, which will come into being centuries later. Discipleship is much more basic to Christianity than that. They leave their previous relationships, not to discredit or disparage them, but to learn a new sort of relationship: they leave their livelihood, not to be butterflies, but to discover a deeper source of security.

Is Mrs. Peter Mentioned In Scripture?

You can find ample evidence of the continuance of family life among the apostles (1 Cor 9:4; most Catholics are quite prepared to bet that Mrs Peter never gets a mention in the Bible: you could probably take them for a fiver one at a time), and the end of the Fourth Gospel finds the fishermen still in perfect touch with fishing (even if they are blessed with a catch only when Jesus guides them to it). But they are in future to live freed by Christ from dependence on earthly life lived in fear. Of course they still need to eat and to be housed and clothed. But they are not to start out with those things in charge of their minds, or only aspiring to “higher things” as a kind of hobby. Instead, they are to turn their faces to a new dawn, a light which unites all who acknowledge it in an eternal community of promise, the covenant-community that is the People of God. In the strange Christian twilight that has enveloped our country, we tend to find people's loyalty to Christ a weak, questionable thing. We need above all to realise our desperate lack of spiritual life and experience. There is a great deal we can easily do without. Spiritual longing is not one of them. Christ offers to reshape our lives. Having resolved no longer to endure our need, and having found the one to whom we can turn for help, we must receive his promise with hopeful hearts, and follow him.
Fr Philip