

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Nonetheless Blessed!

The Kingdom of Heaven is vulnerable on earth; but the Church has learned the particular wisdom of treasuring the wounds that are inflicted on it. The cult of the martyrs, the memory of the witness they bore, is a vital part of our heritage as Christians. Let us think why and how this should be so.

No Grudge

First of all, it is in no way the keeping alive of old bones of contention, or the bearing of a grudge. The history of Ulster displays the consequences of this mistaken view. *If we want to honour the martyrs of Ulster*, the argument goes, *buy more bullets to fire at their enemies*. The point about grudges is that they do no honour to the ones who inspire them. Martyrs are not people who have failed to hate with sufficient intensity, so that we ought to make a better fist of hating in memory of them. We talk, not of keeping their memory *red*, but of keeping it *green*; red is for stop, and for death; green is for go, and for life.

Martyrs And Love

Martyrs die, not for hating too little, but for loving too much, for the world's taste. Their memory can truly be kept only by those who are prepared to love like them. So the cult of martyrs is a liturgy of love that is deeper than the world can understand. Nevertheless, their love was real in the world, and therefore it changed the world: and our remembrance of them changes us and our world. It is because of this that the Beatitudes we read at Mass today are the truest of statements, rather than the most fanciful and unrealistic. On the face of it, they are truly unbelievable in worldly minds. The poor will inherit kingly rule? The gentle will possess the earth? The idealistic are the ones who will be satisfied? Huh! Tell that to the marines! No – but tell it to the martyrs. They display their faith in it rather convincingly. It's classic Christian stuff. For the world, the death of a martyr proves his mistake. For the Christian, it proves the Gospel.

How To Bless

One of the holiest desires we can have is the desire to bless others. Real love desires above all else to find the way to be good for those we love. I would say of many people that I've known, that they were a blessing for me. It is an interesting fact that, if we select one of the people we would

so honour, we can probably identify them in the Beatitudes, in a way that illuminates exactly the reason why they were so important for us. Selflessness, gentleness, tenderness, high ideals, forgiveness, purity of heart, breadth of sympathy, love of peace, readiness to suffer – what a huge sweep of humanity they encompass! And I think it is exactly because these qualities are called unrealistic in the world that they have such power to bless us.

Don't Be Deceived

Thomas More knew better than most the price he had to pay for his high ideals. He also knew that you don't achieve goodness by avoiding evil. He didn't sacrifice *evil* things in his path to glory, but the most loveable and beautiful ones. The choice of sanctity, for him, involved heroic surgery, in which power, including the power to do good, and a most affectionate family life, and a host of intimate friendships with the greatest and best people, and the respect of his peers, and the sweet harmony of a life which embraced all those blessings with sensitivity, humility, and measure, had to be emptied out in favour of a single value, one which had been cast easily aside by scholars, bishops, lawyers and politicians. We should never be guilty of undervaluing the Beatitudes. They speak of simplicity, poverty, gentleness and so on. But these are not cheap values. We do not go to heaven in our feather beds.

Fr Philip