

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

## Riding A Donkey

Donkeys are sometimes, I believe, difficult creatures, though less so than mules. They have nevertheless the most loveable faces, communicating a look of humility; I've always thought this the most attractive of human characteristics, and the illusion that it is shared by donkeys has often attracted the attention of those who've described them. One of the good things about that dubious blessing, the British Seaside, is that on our windswept beaches many of us who will never put a hunter at a mighty fence in South Notts have made friends with a donkey, and have ridden on his back.

### Into The Great King's City

What strikes you about paintings of Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem is the relatively huge size of the donkey. No real donkey of my acquaintance could preserve anyone's dignity as these painted ones do. They are so small, and seeing an adult riding one on news footage, we are usually filled with pity for the poor animal. Scholars tell us kings used to ride them in ancient times, as a sign that they did not need to come on a warhorse (as the Queen rides in a Victorian barouche rather than an armoured car). The message is one of trust in one's people, and in the peaceful state of the realm.

### Come To Me

Humility is at the very heart of Jesus. He is the only human being who made divine claims for himself without a grain of selfishness or vainglory. Like the king on the donkey, the truly glorious do not need vainglory. But pride is not the only thing he doesn't need. We can only help one another if we have the elasticity, the room within, for the other person to enter. Jesus had room within. He had whole realms of hospitality, limitless available sympathy. When he spoke of *many rooms in my Father's house* his hearers already knew the resonant space to which he referred; they had already been received there, they had sensed their freedom to enter and move forward. What a tremendous gift they received: what a transforming encounter! No wonder they felt themselves being changed, enlarged, enfranchised by their closeness to Jesus. The point was that, although it was his presence that made the gift possible, its substance was not his human friendship, or his human wisdom, or his human power, but the fact that we found in him our Way

to the Father. That is the meaning of his statements, *I am the gate of the sheepfold* and *I am the way*. Despite all the dynamism and attraction of this man, those who knew him were more aware of a mystery beyond all human facts, in which he lived at home (he said: *If the Son of the house makes you free, you will be free indeed*). Jesus himself was filled with the urgent mission to communicate this vast dimension to everyone he met. When he opens the eyes of the blind or raises up the crippled, it is so that they can enter the Temple, from which the maimed are excluded by rabbinic law; but he spoke of the Temple that was his own body. When the man born blind was expelled from the Synagogue he found a new place to worship, in his coming to Jesus.

### Humility Lets Truth Be Seen

In our weakness, we know that humility means not hiding the truth about ourselves. For Jesus, the only Son of God, that meant two things: selfless simplicity (riding on a donkey, asking nothing for himself, having nowhere to lay his head), but also the firm insistence on his central place in the religion of the human race (which brings him condemnation for blasphemy). For his divine claim to be visible for what it was, it was essential that he should come without earthly power or circumstance; even if this meant that he should wear a crown of thorns and a robe of mockery. Behind the bruises, through the beaten flesh, the eyes of God gaze on our need for him, and banish the chariots from Ephraim. *Fr Philip*