

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

## “Lord! Save Me!”

Peter “felt the force of the wind, and began to sink”. He cried *Lord! Save me!* because he was where he was at Jesus’ invitation. This is very interesting, because it isn’t the cry of a lost sheep, who has got into a mess by wandering off the map. It’s the cry of a disciple, who has got into a mess through his attempted obedience to Christ.

### Who Has Been His Counsellor?

One of God’s mysteries is the rôle played by evil in his plans. This is inescapably real. When we say those grand-sounding things, like *God rules over sin and death*, we aren’t just saying we can forget about them. We have to say that God can make use of these things, and we can tell that he does. Thousands of his saints become so by martyrdom; thousands more become so as nurses, and even more become so as patients. This scheme of things was certainly not invented by a human being. Can it be that it was chosen because it leads us to a certain kind of prayer? Many people don’t like the words in the Lord’s prayer which we translate as *Lead us not into temptation*. We can do better, and say: *Do not put us to the test*, understanding *test* as the ultimate testing of the world by fire, the last judgment. But the prayer that God might not put us to the test shouldn’t mean that we refuse the Last Judgment. We want to be judged worthy, and not condemned; but we must submit to it.

### God’s Son Was Tested

In fact the Gospel says rather specifically that, after his Baptism in the Jordan, Jesus was *led into the desert to be tempted by Satan* (Mark says, he was *thrown* into the desert). If Jesus had said his own prayer, it certainly wasn’t granted; but then, it wasn’t granted in Gethsemane either. What seems to me to be really impressive about these stories is the disturbing realisation that *God is using the presence of evil* as a factor in his plan. If God’s plan is about defeating evil, we would have been pleased to see a straight fight, with everyone in the proper uniform: the good guys wear white hats. Instead, we have this disturbing sense that God designs that Joseph be sold as a slave, that Assyria burn the Temple, that Jesus be handed over to be crucified; the saints are in prison, the Chosen Race is a defeated people, the priests are tearing their garments and decreeing a punishing death; and the Son of God is a convict. *Thy Will be done*.

### A Powerful Sense Of Vocation

Clearly, when we fall into the hand of the living God, we need to hang on to our hats, and especially to cultivate an indomitable sense that we are still in his care, even when all the signs are that he might have forgotten, or even forsaken us. Once we have cottoned on to the scope of divine planning, we realise that we have been warned. The Psalms are full of the difficult truth that *God is the giver of life and death, who brings us low and raises us on high*. It would therefore sell him seriously short if we call him the Giver of Life without remembering his more upsetting qualities.

### The Fearsome Fulness Of Life

We may not believe that God wishes anyone ill, and therefore we must accept that coming to the fulness of life *demand*s that we pass through the shadow of death. Peter senses this, and asks to be called to walk on the sea. Jesus says simply: *Come*. Is this a dramatic recalling of their first meeting, ten chapters ago, when Jesus said *Come* to two fishermen in their boat, *and at once they left their boat and followed him*? Or is it Matthew’s version of that morning story on the beach, where Peter leaps into the water and swims to the shore where the risen Lord awaits them? Today Peter calls Jesus *Lord*, and the disciples bow before him, and call him *Son of God*. They are already expressing Easter faith – faith in its awesome fulness.

*Fr Philip*