

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

## Pax Tibi, Marce!

*Peace to you, Mark, my Evangelist!* These are the words inscribed on the scroll held by the Venetian winged Lion; the lion being the apocalyptic emblem of St Mark. I expect the Venetians, possessing (allegedly) the body of St Mark, pinched from abroad (like many other Venetian treasures) thought that peace for Mark was peace for Venice; they didn't seem to mind that their patron was a stolen corpse. Mark was venerated as first Patriarch of Alexandria in Egypt, and is no doubt still deeply revered by our Coptic brethren, who look to the Patriarch of Alexandria as their Pope. But the chief thing we say about Mark is to do with the Gospel that bears his name.

### Evangelist

Although we call the evangelists by name, no-one actually knows who they were. The four Gospels are unsigned documents, by which we can be sure that they weren't written like any other books. Authors are pretty jealous about their literary rights; these authors wrote anonymously, because what they were writing was not their own. They were *ministers*, faithfully passing on a divine tradition: so they were acting in the name of the Saviour, and of his Church. Their names didn't matter. What mattered, and still matters, is the signature we hear when their words are read out: *This is the Good News of the Lord!*

### Happy New Year

Today we embark upon a new year of salvation, and the Church chooses words from the last days of our Lord's freedom for this new dawn: *Stay awake!* The image he gives us is of servants loyally at their posts, waiting for the return of their Master. We are therefore to think of ourselves as *doorkeepers* – not sullen, three-headed dogs set to exclude, but ones who are ready to open and admit, givers of access and welcome. The Lord is at our gates: the new year of salvation is beginning: and Mark is the evangelist who will guide us to the good news this year.

### He Must Not Find You Asleep

I think we can all make a fervent prayer on the first Sunday of Advent, that our familiarity with the words of the Gospel will

not prevent our receiving it with joy in this new year. The Gospel has yet to make its impact on us, and this must be true: your holinesses can't, mustn't think that God has finished with you, that the state you are now in is the end product of divine grace. No, there is much more to come! To greet the Gospel in our sleep is to yield to complacency, or to despair, or to weariness of spirit, all of which allow us to forget the urgency of the present moment. Meeting God is the mystery that renews us. This encounter has to be transforming. It repels the boredom of habit, it blows away the poisonous clouds of self-deprecation and unreality, and sharpens the senses to a new awareness of our value and dignity in his sight. *He has left us in charge, each with our own task:* and now he is about to return, and must find us awake and aware, with our minds in gear to his commandments. We may have become geared to some earthly process, which will only ask that we become a cog in a mechanism. We sell ourselves into slavery for money or status, and we grow to be like the machines we serve. All of that must be converted to the frame of mind in the Gospel of Mark: schooled in the awareness of God, eyes and ears alert for his coming, hearts set on the Kingdom we are to inherit, we must attune ourselves to the breathless, hurtling pace of the second Evangelist, for whom every incident is a step on the way to Easter, with its transforming of all things earthly. Like the man who so unselfishly wrote this gospel, we must not look for its power in our own resources – like unbelievers – but recognise that the Kingdom of Heaven is upon us, and we are its heirs.

*Fr Philip*