

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

## Consolation

It means *being soothed by another*, and through the Old Testament this comfort is reserved for God; human comfort doesn't reach the spot, and by nature we are comfortless. This is quite an important fact which can be taught by experience, and it is a home truth for all kinds of addicts, whose need for comfort is boundless, and whose disappointment is continual. The Greek word for consolation is *parakaleo*, which leads to the New Testament's word for the Holy Spirit, *the Paraclete*. Only his divine consolation is sufficient to still our unquenchable thirst for healing.

### Advent – God Is With Us

God does not promise us anaesthesia – the consolation that consists in sending us to sleep. On earth we all come to know pain that won't go away until we go away ourselves: that compromising of life which unites all creatures: in disguise, such pains are our mortality. We often think that death comes as a friend, when it puts an end to a life which is no longer comfort-able. That's a pretty negative kind of friendship! God's consolation consists of salvation, and it is one with his creativity; the God who created you shows his divine faithfulness to you by raising you from death, by remaking you with a greater life than ever. This belief pours from the Advent liturgy in a torrent of hope and promise. All the time we are assured that God will do the consoling, that he himself will gather the lost and comfort them.

### “Take The Pain Away!”

One of the things that make it hard to preach God's message is that it doesn't offer us that lulling-to-sleep consolation which seems to be on offer in the various substitutes the world turns to. Some people believe that, because prayer isn't followed by instant miraculous euphoria, it is a sham performance. On the other hand, a little wisdom would soon teach us that if life is painful, it isn't so because of a *mistake* on God's part, which is instantly to be ironed out on application. *God has his purposes* which transcend our calculations. He is not a plucker-out of favourites: indeed, the only-begotten Son showed us that to suffer deeply and totally the horror of mortality was the

unavoidable vocation of the Son of God. We mustn't think that *consolation* means the administration of *tranquillisers*.

### Comfort Ye My People

In the old word *comfort* is buried *fors*, the Latin word for *strength*. Luke tells us that when Jesus prayed in the garden, there came *an angel of God to comfort him*. To give him strength that would enable him to go to the Cross, an angel came. So we pray for consolation, not to reduce us to sleep, but to make us strong and alive. Sleep is for weary disciples, who could not watch one hour, and for soldiers whose vigil over the tomb came to nothing. There is something *vigorous* about the life God has comforted: he seems to promise us that there is more to come, that the wilderness is going to become viable, that the earth-moving has begun which will create a new way through. There are sometimes depths of pain for which sleep is the only help. But God's consolation promises an awakened humanity, which finds a new dawn.

### Wait And Long For The Day Of God...

*...when the sky will dissolve in flames and the elements melt in the heat.* These startling words call on us to look forward expectantly to something whose description sounds uncomfortably like nuclear meltdown. This frightful prospect is the measure of our willingness to trust God. What we await is what God has promised. There can be nothing in our prayer that asks God to rethink, to make us otherwise, to rub out our difficulties. But our glee is not because the future contains nothing we need fear. We too are human, and the passing of the world humans have dominated can't help threatening us! The prospect is of a world turning to wilderness. But it is in the wilderness that the road will appear, and once we have registered the fact that we are going to see the filling-in of valleys, the levelling of the peaks, we are preparing for something dramatic and intentionally unsettling. It is very dramatic, incarnated, real language. Correspondingly we must be realistic in our Advent believing, and with realism make the road ready for God to come.

*Fr Philip*

