

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

## Luke's Piece Of Fish

The deceptive simplicity of Luke's story of the risen Lord's eating a piece of grilled fish can be very thought-provoking. *Do human beings raised from the dead eat?* First of all, we know that eating is to do with nourishing a *mortal* body. It's one of the most timebound things we do; and the seemingly "eternal" task that it is, truly teaches us precisely the opposite: *we aren't eternal*. We're so strapped in to the continuum of time, that if we stopped eating and drinking, even for a short time, we would perish. You can't get more mortal than that.

### Life As We Know It

Bodies: movement, irritability, respiration, nutrition, growth, excretion, reproduction: such are the marks of being alive that we know. Each of these qualities relates very closely to the *transience* of life. In moving from place to place we feel freer than when we stand still. But in fact we are acknowledging the local limitation of our being. I used to know a girl who told me, "My body can be in Birmingham, while my soul is at the Taj Mahal." I still haven't worked out what she meant. I thought, and think, the whole girl was (sadly) still in Birmingham. "Irritability" is our way of coping with threats. I express mine partly by my bad temper, and partly by employing policemen: neither of these things shows great kinship with eternity. Breathing is the most temporal activity; one day I'll stop, I know it. Growing (I used to grow taller, but now I just grow heavier) is tied up with feeding and excretion. Reproduction draws its meaning from death, and the need to repopulate the planet. And which of all these things can be understood as an eternal activity? None at all! They all speak to us of death.

### Rising From The Dead

I suppose the question arises: how do we think of a life which has escaped from mortality, when everything we say about life is so related to death? St Paul talks about a "spiritual" body which is different from the one we know: but how different? Our faith affirms that in eternity we shall have a body, and it's hard to think of anyone we know or love in any way that isn't bodily. But our faith sees eternal life as being like God's life, so

that we would not need to be tied to any location, or to defend ourselves against unruly forces, or obey the ticking of the clock by constantly breathing; Jesus himself excludes reproduction from the world to come, because if there's no death there's no need for it. It is hard to imagine any process of growth in such a life, and therefore the question arises: *why would you need to eat a piece of fish?*

### Spiritual Bodies

It occurs to me that one of our problems is always seeing *spirit* and *body* as opposites, instead of understanding them together. But *we are* both together: we are *ensouled bodies*, and the great purpose of the soul is to animate the body, and the body draws its meaning from the soul. If our bodies were truly transparent to the *spiritual* reality that we are, we might be better human beings. If they were transparent to the Holy Spirit, we would be divine beings. I don't know what that is going to be like. But I think I can get an idea of it, from imagining a human life where nothing is *necessary* (like the hard tasks involving movement from place to place, or finding food, or beating off disease and violence), and everything is *possible*.

### A Cream And White Wine Sauce

So when I get to heaven, perhaps I may not need to eat, but I may still rejoice in a perfect *sole Dieppoise* with a superb Sancerre. Now, you may say, *If you don't need to eat, what will your body do with your sole?* I have no answer. I suspect that if ever I am judged worthy to inherit eternal life, there will be forms of joy which make me forget the recipe for *sole Dieppoise* – things beyond the imagining of this earthbound brain of mine. But until these things can be revealed to me, I have the preserved memory of one who had died, standing amongst those he loved, saying, "Have you anything to eat?" I don't understand it, from a theological point of view, and my old theology teacher wrote a book to prove it couldn't have happened. But I know that Jesus had a great determination to share his table with sinners and unbelievers; and I just love the story that, when he saw they couldn't believe their eyes, he decided to ask for food! *Fr Philip*

