

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

## Remain

I know a Golden Labrador who is a very disobedient dog. I used to think he was a daft dog, until I discovered his exquisitely attentive attitude to the words *Sit* and *Lie down* the moment he caught the smell, sound, or sight (in that order) of a biscuit packet. This sad discovery alerted us all to the fact that Mac is not stupid, but stubborn. The one command I doubt whether he will ever obey is *Stay*.

### A Word Of Huge Importance

The Greek word *menein* which lies behind the English word *remain* is hugely present in the teaching of Jesus, appearing 55 times in the writings of John alone and, with its derivatives, a whopping 177 times in the New Testament as a whole. The reason why it occurs so often in John is surely because the Church where he lived was afflicted by a great schism or split, where a huge number of the members fell away. John knew that the virtue of keeping together was paramount: thus his respect for the word “remain” as a prime commandment. It is vital in today’s Gospel of the Vine.

### All Perfection Is Found In Him

If you want to see how any virtue or grace works, you can look at Jesus. *God wanted every perfection to be found in him*; so we should look to him to illuminate our ignorance. We sometimes translate *menein* as *make your home in*; and he tells us in today’s Gospel: *Make your home in me as I make my home in you*. This is a stunning proposal from the Son of God. He is inviting us to move in to his life – into an intimacy like nothing we have ever known between human beings; after all, in the most intimate relationships we know, there are limits to our power of generosity, our willingness to love (John knew that, living in the ruins of a disastrous breakdown of relationships in his church). But intimacy with God is unlimited by any weakness or failure except our own; and Jesus shows us how little time he has for taking account of our sins, when he goes willingly to the Cross, when he pardons his torturers, when he chooses and keeps his pathetic disciples. *As I make my home in you* covers a multitude of sins, because it is a divine generosity that founds it, not a human

deal or business enterprise. In the Spirit of this generosity *Jesus remains with us*, even when we utterly fail to respond appropriately or to deserve him. That’s the virtue he is proposing to us: that we make our home in him, as totally as he has *moved in* to the human family, with its Peter and its Judas, and with me and you. He will make his home in us, whether we love him or crucify him.

### God Remains

Human virtues all have an eternal prototype in God the Father. Jesus is faithful because his Father is faithful; and what Jesus does on earth is a perfect mirror of what the Father does: he says: *I have loved you just as the Father has loved me: remain in my love. If you keep my commandments you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and remain in his love*. You can see that we are walking here on the very edge, the border between the human and the divine, the barrier which once separated us from God. Jesus becomes the bridge, by which we can cross into the life God lives. Jesus makes perfectly human the life of the Son of God. In his human nature we can see the perfect obedience which is open to divine life. He loved so totally the people he met, placing no barrier before them. In this we see a humanity which places no barrier between itself and the Father. *Obedience* here doesn’t mean subjection or self-sacrifice. It means a nature which is in perfect harmony, which fulfils itself in peaceful openness to God. As branches of the Vine, we know how our fruitfulness depends on keeping our unity with Jesus, living in trust and obedience and love.  
*Fr Philip*