

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

## City Of Peace

“Jerusalem” means “City of Peace”, and this is the most ironic fact: because it has been the holiest place on earth and at the same time the place most sunk in helpless war.

### Are All Wars Religious?

I suppose if you're prepared to risk your whole life and the life of those you love by taking part in war – be it a civil war or a war against a foreign power, it makes little difference these days – then you're probably bearing witness to a reality that means more to you than your safety, perhaps even your survival. I think that would qualify as a religious situation. But then I think of the war in Iraq, and I reflect that many people did not think of it as a war they supported with their whole hearts; and if it had been fought at the cost of conscripting young people in general, as opposed to those signed up as professional soldiers, I doubt if it would have been waged. On the other side, I feel that many Iraqis were deeply moved to defend their country against invasion, but divided in their mind about their ruler. I wonder how far the language of Islam went in addressing this situation. Perhaps the idea of a really religious war is a complete figment, and in reality all wars are the selfish, violent, evil, destructive, greedy, sinful realities we suspect they are. Not, then, religious at all.

### What Price Jerusalem?

So where does that leave the City of Peace, with the Muslim Dome of the Rock built over the Temple of Herod the Great, with the Holy Sepulchre not far away, and a huge heritage of blood and hatred under its floorboards? You may feel that it is no coincidence that a city which is so sacred should also be torn by war. It becomes an icon of the warring depths of the human heart: the deeper we dig into our soul, the nearer we approach to that fear of love and acceptance which makes us capable of hatred and violence on the grandest scale. We still call it *City of Peace*, even though it is constantly given new reasons to mourn; we Christians trace our own birthplace to this City over which Jesus himself shed tears, and outside which he shed his blood; surely our violence is as much at home here today as our aspirations for

peace. We cannot pretend to have clean hands.

### What Proves God Loves Us

The proof of God's love is that Christ died for us while we were still sinners. This is the pure and flourishing spring which will wash away the filth of our past, and cleanse this city which has seen so much horror. We can so understand the vision of the Apocalypse: *a holy city coming down from God out of heaven, having all the radiant glory of God, and glittering like a precious, crystal-clear diamond*. This ethereal vision of peace will be God's gift to the earth: a heavenly city of peace. We should receive this promise humbly, and not think the worse of ourselves because he has chosen to save us. Half the problem of receiving salvation is recognising our need for it. It seems to cost us so much to hold up our hands and confess that we need saving. Yet it is not in recrimination that Christ returns in Eastertide, from that sepulchre which still graces the mountain of Jerusalem, but with the news that our fears are at an end. This is the peace he leaves with us, a peace the world cannot give

### The Holy Spirit

This week will include, on Thursday, the solemnity of the Ascension, when we celebrate the going of Jesus to the right hand of the Father. It is a day of parting, certainly, remembering a kind of presence we no longer enjoy; but also a day to put aside the sorrows that darken our horizons, and that susceptibility to grief, of which the disciples show no sign as they return to Jerusalem. Now we can pray for the Holy Spirit, the Father's coming gift. *Fr Philip*