

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

## Glorification

I bet many people have little experience of the dawn. We only tend to be awake for it either because we're ill (when we have little sensitivity towards it) or in midwinter (when it happens behind clouds and rain, or we are too bleary-eyed and late to look at it). Yet our religion has a long tradition of rising early, not to stick our nose onto an early grindstone, but to have leisure to pray and to think, to be ourselves before God as the day begins. Beginning the day like that sets it under the sign of the truth of God.

### Bad Religion

There's a bad sort of religion that doesn't face truthwards at all. This is the sort of religion which suspends (for a while) ordinary feelings, assumptions and responses to take a trip into a fantasy world, where magic things happen and black is white and you can be asked to believe anything, however far-fetched. If that is what religion depends on, it deserves to perish. It takes people *away* from life.

### Good Faith

By contrast, good faith believes that it is the banal and dreary that is false and wrong, and that human life is itself much more wonderful than we usually feel; that the boredom and depression which afflict us is actually the lie, and that real life means rediscovering the miraculous reality that we are. And note well: this is something which most scientists will enthusiastically endorse, and any poet, novelist, sculptor and musician will help us with; once we have decided to look for it, the evidence of our ears and eyes and nose (narcissus and jasmine in the shops this week) and tongue and nerve-endings generally will confirm that life is great and beautiful beyond all its horror and pain. To say this may appear cheap and distasteful to those who don't feel it. It's the duty of everyone who speaks about salvation to respect the pain of those who most need it, who are often incapable of hearing it as credible: like the Hebrew slaves in Egypt, who *would not listen to Moses, so crushed their spirit, and so cruel their slavery*. It is no discredit to the Gospel that many cannot believe it; this only shows their extreme need

for God, and the power over them that the force of evil has achieved.

### Transfiguration

What is this overwhelming happening that so suddenly sweeps through the body of Jesus, and the eyes and hearts of his disciples, on top of a mountain? I guess that unbelievers will dismiss it as more unconvincing religious fireworks, like the Gospel miracles and stories of the Plagues and the Flood. And what about us? Perhaps it's only by the sort of vision enjoyed by the disciples in today's Gospel that people will be enlightened. Clergy try, as good publicists, to think up ways to re-express the Gospel. Often we are doing harm, repackaging and marketing as if the saving power of God depended on such wheezes and dodges. In the end, what takes our hearts by storm is Jesus himself, whose beauty and power so awesomely catches hold of those on top of the mountain. What is happening to them is that they are seeing him as he is. They are seeing the truth about Jesus of Nazareth. It would, indeed, be nothing but a faraway firework display if we were not involved in him. The fact that we are baptised into him means that we are also seeing the truth about ourselves. That's where the story catches us. We fall for him because he embodies the love of God towards all of us, each of us. That is why the shining stops us in our tracks: we are not blinded, but enabled to see because a kind of dawn has overtaken us. If we have to come down from the mountain, to re-enter the indifferent, sad, and possessed world, it is with a gift to share that makes us heralds – yes, even on the Way of the Cross.

*Fr Philip*