

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Humbler Yet

I wonder how someone can allow the citizens to greet him as Jesus was met coming into Jerusalem, if his aim is to be humble. After all, whenever we read Mark's Gospel this year, we find Jesus shunning publicity, hiding from fame, escaping from adoring crowds, silencing the testimony of the demons. Why has he suddenly decided to "go public" in this way?

Go For The Big Picture

To understand, we have to look at his whole purpose. Jesus has had many motives pinned on him by the centuries and their changing understandings. Can we decipher the real truth? How did the carpenter from Galilee actually intend to dispose of his life? When we search for the most comprehensive things he says, we find statements like this one: *I came that they may have life, and have it to the full.* Who are "they" in that line? I don't think we can exclude anyone at all. Jesus never did: even the most excluded people were welcomed, even the most sinful. That is why Judas has his place in the Passion story: to show that Jesus didn't just *tolerate* the odd sinner, on condition that he stayed on the margins of a large crowd of holy folk. He accepted sinners as his close collaborators: and the ones who got closest to him had a true share in his betrayal and his condemnation. In terms of the plot, there really is no need for Judas the Traitor; Jesus wasn't hiding, and the priests therefore had no need of an accomplice. I think Judas is there for a more mysterious purpose: to show an astonishing closeness between God and human sin. Even a traitor can play a part in this drama.

The Life and Soul of the Party

Jesus as a healer, as worker of miracles, as an impressive teacher or preacher, is not the point. Those things were just signs which pointed towards his real meaning. He wanted to reach the climax of his ministry, not by appealing to people's need for a hero, or a cure-all physician, or a champion in their search for their rights (he knew he could have mobilised vast crowds in any of those roles). But they were the temptations he rejected in the wilderness. He was hardly likely to succumb to them now. So why the grand

public entrance, the procession into the City of David, the palms, the royal titles and powerful slogans, and the applause of the crowd? Had he temporarily lost the plot?

Only Lately They Wanted To Stone You

When Jesus hid from publicity, it was because he did know how readily people could mistake his meaning. By the point we have reached today, there is no longer much room for that. The enmity of the priests, the Roman readiness to diagnose treasonable motives, and his awareness of the untrustworthiness of mobs must have made him well aware that the time for his death, which he had already predicted several times, was approaching. This is the moment when he casts secrecy and reticence to the winds, and draws to himself the attention and the judgment of his people. *Son of David, coming in the name of the Lord, entering the Holy City, triumphant but lowly, sitting upon a donkey....* Jesus knows exactly what he is doing, and he knows how many prophecies he will act out in the days to come. We can imagine them running through his mind: *lo, my servant will be exalted, raised to great heights, a man to make people screen their faces, a man who seems scarcely human....pierced through for the faults of the many, punished to bring them peace;* now they all come together, and it is no longer the time for reticence. His full meaning is about to burst from the silence of his past, into a tumultuous present which will judge everyone who is caught up into the story. So he takes a deep breath: *Let it begin!*

Into Your Hands, O Lord

But for all that, his giving himself to Jerusalem is still the most deeply humble of his deeds, accomplished in obedience to all he has learned of the Father. Everyone who contributes to the Passion story can assume they have surrendered him, overcome him, condemned him, or finished him, or all of these things. But they only have a tiny part of the picture. Jesus alone knows the whole story: that he is passing, in every detail of the Passion, into the hands of his Father, and that this Exodus will perfectly reveal the Gospel. His task is simply to give himself in humble trust to the Father. *Fr Philip*