

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

A Deep Obedience

The calling of the fishermen has always fascinated me. Mark begins it with his story on the beach beside the sea of Galilee, and I guess the whole meaning of the word *Galilee* is in his story. He points to Peter, Andrew, James and John and says: *Follow me, and fish for people*. And leaving everything, they follow. The blankness of it dismayed Luke, because to him it didn't seem credible. So he inserts some teaching, and two miracles, one of them in Peter's own family, as background; if you'd seen the power of healing in your own house, you might have become a disciple. But I don't want to lose Mark's original blank call, or the total obedience that greets it. Because I don't think following Christ rests on cold reason, but on a kind of total surrender.

Sounds Like A Cult, Father

At first maybe it does sound like a cult. The difference is that cults subvert the personalities of those who fall for them, robbing them of their power to relate, subjecting them to the will of another person; they are overwhelmed, reduced to empty obedience. Whereas the disciples find themselves invited to deeper life. These things are not spelt out intellectually. But they lie behind Luke's choice of the healing miracle, and especially the miraculous draught of fishes with which Peter is moved off his seat and onto his knees, making a last plea for his former life: *Leave me Lord, I'm a sinful man!* Jesus encourages him, gently prising him from his home ties, and promises him he'll still be a fisherman. What leads them to abandon themselves? The glimpse of fullness, blessedness, which radiates from Jesus, seems to attack their own poverty of life, stirring the roots of desire, opening up to that shapeless area of hope we characterise by the word *yearning*. I think this feeling is one that proceeds from an awareness of total need, that bears fruit in prayer, because only God can interpret or answer such need. It would be deadening to feel that there was no-one to hear or answer such prayer; and I wonder how many in our country, relentlessly taught to despise faith and hope as impossible, are still left with a yearning in the depths of the heart, a divine gift of the hope for God. Out loud, they keep up the

front, bleakly acknowledging the belief that hope is vanity, that it's a rat-race for survival, and the rest. But below this embittered crust, I believe, there is that tenderness which survives, not on any human arguments, or the promising appearance of the world, but on the sheer trust that God, the Lord and Giver of life, raises the dead. You can't confess to this belief openly if you're not a professing Christian; after all, it makes little sense to live your whole life ignoring God if you're secretly relying on him to save you from eternal death when the chips go down. But then so many people don't make a lot of sense, and that's nothing new. I believe that Jesus possessed the power to penetrate the crust and lay bare the tenderness beneath. His willingness to embrace the leper and approach the demoniac signals his indifference to the threat of death or the fear of death. He knows the truth about these fears, and John's words of him are, I believe, near the mark: *he knew what was in people, and did not need to be told*.

He Called Them At Once

So there is the difference between the calling of Christ and the suffocating grasp of a cult. His call does not brook of hesitation, because he speaks directly to the heart, and there is no argument when that happens. Here is Mark's almost favourite word *euthus*, "immediately". Christ's calling comes without mediation, and the answer, if we give it, is immediate, uncritical and total....or it is nothing, and he passes on his way, leaving us to our boat, and our earthly father, and our endless struggle to make a living endlessly obscuring our struggle to make sense of life.
Fr Philip