

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

## Whether They Listen Or Not

Jesus comes to his home town: always a testing moment for anyone starting a movement. The Gospels tell it in various ways: Luke draws the scene with great drama, describing Jesus' claim to fulfil a great Messianic text from Isaiah; and when they hear him, the townsfolk turn against him, and form a lynch-mob to hurl him from a cliff. Mark is simpler, and tells us only that their familiarity with Jesus and his family cause them to reject him as a teacher. One phrase of Mark's stands out vividly, being eliminated by Matthew and Luke: *Jesus was amazed at their lack of faith.*

### Shock Horror

We aren't amazed by anyone's lack of faith; but we can surely be amazed at Jesus' amazement. Some people, Matthew and Luke among them, doubt that Jesus was ever surprised. Many Christians today are so keen to stress his being God that they rush to laud him with divine attributes: because God knows everything, Jesus always knew what was going to happen next. Because God is almighty, Jesus could always do what he liked with the material world. Because of his divine life, we must not say anything about him that smacks of human weakness or limitation. Mark tells us that this is untrue. *Of course* Jesus hoped he would be able to make an impact in his own home town. *Of course* it hurt when he couldn't. What were the feelings of his family when they saw how he was received? Humiliation and sorrow, surely.

### Learning About Sin

Here's a thought: might not the one thing we could teach the Son of God actually be sin? I've often thought that what made Jesus of Nazareth *unlike* us was his power to pray in a total and unbounded way, one that we cannot find because of sin. He received the grace of God in his human heart, but boundlessly, easily, in that he put nothing in its way. But he didn't know sin in his own heart, being untainted by it. He had to learn what sin is, and the damage it does, from us. And when he stands up in his own home town, he feels the undertow of sinful nature preventing their listening and receiving him. Isn't this

the shocking discovery which left him "amazed"?

### How Does He Respond?

When we are rejected as Christian teachers or prophets, we feel utterly broken. To try to share the faith, you have to pin your heart on your sleeve, for daws to peck at. Jesus had to accept his defeat at home, but it disturbed him. How did he find the courage to proceed? We can see that it wasn't easy. When Jesus came to Jerusalem, he had his feelings laid out for him in the great Psalms of Ascent. He should have had an overwhelming sense of homecoming, coupled with the experience of communion with his brothers and sisters in the Chosen People. Instead, we find him speaking sadly of Jerusalem as the City that destroys the prophets, and at last we see him weeping as he comes in sight of it, unable to contain his grief at its tragic refusal of him. For all that, there is never any doubt that he will persevere in carrying the Word to the fulfilment of its work, and that he will receive in his own body the wounds inflicted on the Word: Ps 69 says: *It is for you that I suffer insults, my face is covered with shame. I am estranged from my brothers, alienated from my own mother's sons; for I am eaten up with zeal for your house, and insults against you fall on me.* Jesus responded to the experience of sin by turning to the Scriptures and finding there the right way to think and feel. I'm sure that psalm was often in his mind. We go to the Scriptures in imitation of him, as, speaking to us on the road we are travelling, he opens our minds to understand, and makes our hearts burn within us as he speaks to us. In grief and joy alike we are to find our place within the providence of God.  
*Fr Philip*