

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

## Loaves And Fishes

We Catholics most often return to our faith at the weekly Eucharist. We therefore see the Mass quite plainly as the heart of our religious lives, the indispensable point of contact, the place where we meet Christ with a fullness and trustworthiness not to be replaced or superseded by any other experience. What's more, it's also the same for all the others; in the Mass we meet one another in a uniquely deep and irreplaceable sense, which is what enables us to offer a sign of his peace when we're blazingly angry with our nearest and dearest, and know it as a peace deeper than our weakness, deeper than our disappointment. The Eucharist is the place where we lay hands on the gifts of God, and give our own gifts. That is why there is a symbolic surrender of our gifts in the offertory, and we ask God to receive us, and Christ to make us an everlasting gift to the Father. The Eucharist takes the lid off our sealed world of self, and empties us into the open, incorporates us into the Church: so that we speak as one, saying "we" instead of "I". It takes more than a lifetime to form human hearts into Eucharistic hearts.

### Feeding The Hungry

One of the most satisfying experiences I know is the setting before people of food they can really enjoy. Knowing what they *need* is the first condition; knowing what they will *like* is the icing on the cake! Jesus certainly knows the need of humanity in a uniquely accurate way: because humanity needs God. Perhaps that is why people used to be so passionately interested in Jesus. They recognised in him the person they most needed, so they were willing to give up anything to stay with him. But what he shows us, in this miracle which is itself multiplied throughout the Gospels, is that he is ready to start with loaves and fishes. The obvious message is that we can start there too, in a world obsessed with its own needs, to the extent that it sees in satisfying needs the ultimate experience of human nature; after all, our society seeks lifelong fulfilment in acquiring possessions – either accumulating property or simple shopping, depending on whether you're a big fish or a little fish. Education is being rapidly reduced to "what will favour the economy of our country"; the newspapers are rapidly

becoming showcases for spending; the television is being taken over by long meditations on what kind of house, what kind of car, what kind of food, what kind of clothes you want to buy – as if there were something eternal to be found in these choices. Perhaps we think the greatest evidence of freedom would be to have to power constantly to choose, so that your house were always full of decorators and installers of the latest gear! What would Jesus of Nazareth say to Jeremy Clarkson, or Trinny and Susannah, or to Laurence Llewellyn Bowen? I think he might have a little more in common with some of the more down-to-earth cooks; and that is why this feeding miracle is so important, and is told six times in the Gospels.

### Going Deeper

We should look for paths in our experience which lead us deeper into life. If we are invited sometimes to learn the feeding path by fasting from food, that isn't so strange. Look at the sacraments, made from water, bread, wine, oil, human love and family life, the experience of illness, the experience of forgiveness, the experience of promising. Look at the liturgy, with its themes of word, silence, listening: light, darkness, time: giving and receiving, coming together, sorrow and joy. The constancy of these realities, as they succeed one another so regularly and universally, unite us in one body under Christ as head, paying due homage to the mystery of our lives before God the Creator. Here we shall open our eyes, to catch a glimpse of the Holy Spirit with (ah!) bright wings.  
*Fr Philip*