

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Lift High The Cross

The lifting up of the Cross is a deed whose meaning is inexhaustible: in history, it was the deed by which Jesus of Nazareth passed from this world to the Father; so within the bounds of historical time it makes present the eternal love of God; in eternity, it is the lifting-up of the Son to the right hand of the Father; the completion of Jesus' human gift is the Father's gift of glory to his Son. So the lifting up of the Cross consecrates human nature to its Maker.

Who Will Lift The Cross?

There is a whole mode of questions running through the Bible: the Almighty asks in the heavenly court: *Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?* And Isaiah answers: *Here I am. Send me.* In the Apocalypse a powerful angel cries in a loud voice: *Who is worthy to open the scroll and to break its seals?* and the one who is seeing the vision continues: *But there was no-one, in heaven or on the earth or under the earth, that was able to open the scroll and read it.* The Psalms ask: *Who shall climb the mountain of the Lord? Who shall stand in his holy place?* It is as if the Jewish mind has always been expecting a figure, an individual, to arise who will be the minister, the one who will fulfil the promises of God: the Judge, the King, the Prophet, the Priest, the Teacher in their different ways have been the focus of this hope and expectancy for the people as a whole. In the same spirit of searching for the Holy One, we can ask, *Who will lift up the Cross?*

Are You The One Who Is To Come?

John the Baptist's question to Jesus displays the same hope and expectation; and in the Fourth Gospel he seems to answer his own question when he says of Jesus, *There is the Lamb who bears the sins of the world away.* We can't be certain at this distance whether John the Baptist really knew what he meant by these words: but we can be fairly sure what the Evangelist meant by them. He is making the Baptist announce the coming of the Crucified one, as if to tell us at the very beginning that the destiny of Jesus is to die sacrificially for the world's forgiveness.

Simon of Cyrene

We're given two extensions to our understanding of the Cross of Jesus. The first comes in the form of Jesus' summons: *if anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him take up his cross and follow me.* This tells us that we are also to be cross-bearers. Secondly, we are given the embodiment of this way of following, in the person of Simon of Cyrene, who literally picks up the Cross and follows Jesus to Calvary. At first sight this looks somewhat strained. After all, Simon was *enlisted* (in Luke, *seized and forced*) to carry the Cross. Did the Evangelists want to exclude him from any moral sharing with Jesus? I doubt it. The Gospel remembers his name, in fact Mark tells us the names of his sons too; I'm almost sure that Simon became a Christian. If so, he is a perfect model for us, who are also called to bear the Cross. We don't see it, we don't understand it when it is happening, any more perhaps than Simon did. But the experience of carrying the Cross has within it a salutary power, and is able to make us like Jesus. When we find the world incomprehensibly hard and cruel, when we are least able to sympathise with its Creator, then God is teaching us as Jesus taught Peter. *Get behind me* can be interpreted as *get out of my sight.* But it is also a way of saying *Follow me.* Perhaps we will take part in the Exaltation of the Cross without knowing, treading in the path of Jesus without understanding, and still receive in our mortal flesh the insignia of the Crucifixion. As once we sought to see the wounds in his hands and his side, perhaps one day Jesus will turn over our hands, and show us the wounds there which we ignore, or call by a different name, but which remake us, sharers in his glorified image.
Fr Philip