

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

“I’ve Found It!”

- or, in Greek, “*Eureka!*” The delighted cry of Archimedes of Syracuse as, sinking into a bath, he spotted the theory of displacement which would allow him to assay the gold-content of a crown. (The times I’ve got into the bath, and never formed any theories at all!) But we’ve all had the house out looking for something, and at last come upon the object of our search; we’ve all gone traipsing through shops looking for the exact item we want, and at last seen it winking at us from a shelf. Jesus identifies this as a religious moment. It’s a moment when we find that the world makes sense, when our confidence in our power to “seek and find” is confirmed. It’s also, embarrassingly, a situation where the most irreligious of people will sometimes stop and murmur a prayer to St Anthony. (I feel sorry for Anthony. He was a fearsome denouncer of the mighty, and a most eloquent preacher of the Gospel, and is now relegated to the heavenly lost-property office. Still, he is perhaps the most frequently-invoked saint.) We are still rummaging, looking in strange places for the second time. *I know I had it when I came in*, we protest. *I felt sure I put it on this table*. And even if we could well proceed without it, we find we can’t drop it and think about something else. We abhor the little domestic mystery, whereby things Go Missing. It is a piece of nonsense, the rebellion of inanimate things, and we can’t be satisfied, we can’t let it win.

God Too

Today’s Gospel tells us that God is like that also. Now, don’t make a mistake! It isn’t that God loses anything, that he is like an absent-minded housewife or a distracted shepherd. Rather, he is a God who does not give in when we lose him. That is why our human capacity to ask questions, never to stop asking questions, is a holy quality. How exasperated we can get when a little child keeps answering us, *Why? Why?* But he’s reminding us, who have got bored living in a world we’ve done everything to control, and predict, and diminish, that we are not on a train-timetable of precise accuracy. We are on an argosy, a ship of discovery, where every answer generates a new and bigger question. When we get to the end of all our questions, we will be asking one huge, simple question, standing at the mighty final threshold: *What shall I see when I enter this door?* The answer to *that* question will be the end of all

questing, the discovery which is everything. I look forward to it with great hope.

The Father Awaits Us

The reason why it’s always worth seeking is that, when all the ways have been taken and all the solutions tried, *God is waiting at the end of the world*. We may believe that God is not the answer; thousands do think that, and are busy trying any other road to find happiness, security, a reason for living, a reason to be who they are. We can’t speak from personal experience about their chosen path; we can’t predict what will happen to them, even if we ourselves have tried some similar way. I’ve never been married, or been given political power, or earned vast wealth; I have to speak of these ways of being in the world from the point of view of a spectator. But I do believe that all ways lead to God, either as the answer to final questions, or as final judgment, or as final fulfilment. When Jesus tells us it’s better to arrive there a poor person, hungry, and weeping, rather than a rich person, satisfied and laughing, it’s because the former is more likely to be searching, longing, and desirous of God than the latter, who *has his reward already*.

The Desire Of God

Because nothing can be added to or taken from God, he doesn’t desire as we do. But he has a desire which is centred in *our* desiring. He, who knows our inmost self, senses our need in all its dimensions, and because of his vision for us, that we should one day share his life, and love him and be loved by him, God can sense our incompleteness as if it were his own (which it could never be). From our inadequate viewpoint, we might even say that God made us, in all our poverty and dependence, because he himself had nothing to long for. The masterly depiction of the father of the Prodigal Son explores this reality. He has the happiness of the ancestral home, his elder son waits to succeed him; yet he is longing for the return of the younger son, who took his inheritance and left. It is as if, having the wherewithal to feed him, honour him, and heal him, the father feels his distance as inconsolable, as a constant pain. When the boy returns, “a long way off”, it is the father who says what his return will mean. The answer to our questions won’t be on our own mean terms, but on the scale of eternal, almighty love.

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