

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

## Different And Particular

One of the things I most love about holiness is the way it consecrates the difference - the characters - of the saints. There's a painting in the Cathedral of Siena of which I have something near to awe: it's called *La Maesta*, and it is by Duccio di Buoninsegna. It has as its centrepiece the Madonna and Child enthroned. She is flanked by two ranks of angels, and they each turn on you that pensive, resolved gaze from almond eyes which is so characteristic of Sienese painted girls. But the angels are identical siblings, sprung from a single multiple birth; I shouldn't think you can have a litter of angels, being spiritual as they are; if they sprang from a single thought of God's, perhaps they could be a *chapter*, like the ones from Hell. However, the saints who kneel in the foreground, and above all the Madonna herself, are totally characteristic human figures, recognisable from what they look like and what they carry. Here is a rather soulful Agnes, with her lamb; John the Baptist, hairy of head, face, and clothing; Peter, with a magnificent set of white curls, and Paul, bald as an egg with a luxuriant beard.

### Made Members Of One Body

You can tell the Spirit's work by this one characteristic: that the individual whom God made is enhanced, not diminished, by membership of the Body of Christ. When you think of the awful predictability of some movements, the dire uniformity of Mormonism, the Witnesses of Jehovah, or Chinese Communism, you can only give thanks for the superb selfhood that flows in the Communion of Saints. Becoming holy doesn't mean chopping everyone down to one size and forcing everyone into one mould. Rather the reverse: God's original intention, in creating such a complementary puzzle as the human race, is pushed to its completion, as the wonderful individuality of each member finds its proper way to belong to the whole Body. You're invited, God says, to be yourself: I didn't create you to be something or someone else. It is by being exactly what God designed you to be, that you will find your place in the whole body.

### What Am I For?

I don't think it's beyond the terms of Paul's thought to ask, what sort of member of the Body of Christ should I be? I don't buy his

idea that some parts have greater dignity than others. For instance, I rarely find that noses are especially magnificent body parts: but what could be more important, when confronted by a hyacinth in spring, or a glass of Volnay any time, than the nose? Equally, you may never think about your pyloric sphincter, the unsung hero of the digestive system. But if it went on strike you, and your fellow-diners, might know more about it than you expected.

### The Pentecostal Spirit

*The particular way in which the Spirit is given to each person is for a good purpose*, says Paul at Mass today; and what a license that is for the variety and display of the human rainbow, in all its multicoloured brilliance! No wonder the gift Jesus offers his disciples in the Gospel is the simple gift of peace. Peace exists where there is variety: if *one* thing were at peace, it wouldn't be particularly surprising: it would have nothing to argue with. Peace is the miracle by which many things share one space in harmonious and fruitful community. When you think of a good marriage, it builds its strength on the very diversity of the partners. Because love has brought them together, their unity depends greatly on their persistent selfhood. Some poor souls don't understand this, and try to beat their partners into shape, thinking that marriage is about uniformity. It always ends in tears. You can't love your mirror image, or live with a parrot who repeats all your lines to you. Instead, you should find your partner endlessly different, opposite, new, and (most of the time) miraculously fond of you, for also being so. In this way a husband and wife enrich each other, renew each other, and affirm each other. This is peaceful, even if sometimes it needs that other Paschal gift, *for those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven*. We might say that the Holy Spirit shows his presence when people find their gifts honoured and employed for the good of the whole body, and where they respond by ever greater generosity, becoming more and more courageously themselves, and more and more generously giving themselves for others. I feel sure that St Hugh's is as good a place as anywhere for us to discover these gifts of the Holy Spirit, by generously sharing our lives with one another.

*Fr Philip*