

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Be Tolerant With Each Other

Intolerance is a very ugly word. It's a negative word, which seems to imply a lost peace, a failed virtue, a disability. It isn't a Christian value, even if it has often defiled Christians. Above all, it isn't a divine quality: so its negativity is permanent and wrong. One of the most precious facts we discern about God is that he *tolerates* us. If sometimes we resent the fact that he tolerates *other* people, even when we think they are "crying to heaven for vengeance", that just shows how intolerant we are by comparison.

Law Of The Jungle

There's a lot of intolerance in nature. It's a blunt instrument that sorts out the strong from the weak, and makes sure that the strongest strain survives. I think there is a throwback to that animal law in our families. Surely every parent will know that awful weariness as the children come complaining of each other, or where the cries of *It's not fair* and *I'm not playing any more* alternate with outbursts of tears and the sinister sounds of mugging behind the sofa. *We've found a lovely family home*, a friend confided. *It's so big, we can all have our own space. We never need to meet at all!* I heard an interesting account of the lives of submariners, where the space is so confined that there are three sailors per bed, and the vessel can only work if a third of its crew is snoring. In that sort of confinement, where not even your sleeping-space is your own, the men get frightfully sensitive to the little personal property they're allowed, and World War can threaten if anyone steals or diverts it. Children sharing a small home can be just as territorial; it's a hard time.

Learning To Share

If our animal nature makes us prone to ugly intolerance, our emotional and intellectual powers can lead us to long for communion and sharing of life. This makes us human, and establishes in us a willingness to accept each other which is stronger than our need to compete. If only we could cut the corner and go straight to love! The truth is that the kind of love God has designed us for is hugely beyond our human nature. We can't even recognise the way to it, let alone tell its dimensions. If our earthly life is a battlefield, what hope do we have, realistically, of finding our way to divine love? We can get pretty

negative about ourselves on earth. We let our relationships deteriorate into rudeness and contempt; we allow others to use and abuse us, secretly not believing that we deserve any better. The truth of the animal law, we come to accept, is the final truth about us. We learn to live in the jungle. This, I think, is where we most need those who teach us to take care of us. Parents usually have a God-given sense that they're there to teach peace to their children. But if parents themselves are messed-up in whatever way, the children learn, not what would be best, but what is. Parents who are threatened and insecure will typically teach their children to fear and to be defensive. Parents who have a bad experience of human weakness will communicate their unease to the next generation; and our own disposition often makes our worst fears come true. If we enter the world expecting abuse and violence, we're seldom disappointed.

Bringers Of Hope

I believe most of us can point to a *subsequent* relationship which modified the lessons of our home or our earliest life, and which taught us to review - sometimes to disregard - the negative messages we picked up. We teach one another throughout our lives. I daily remember with heartfelt gratitude the people who have taught me hope and love. I was never an easy pupil, I know; and possibly few of them know what vital medicine they were delivering to me. What they all have in common was that they accepted me as I was, and found something to like and value in me. When I could see little of that in myself, they held up a mirror of sincere regard, and that helped me to hope. Nothing is more precious. Hope has to carry us over that vast distance between the human and the divine. We can only make the journey together; tolerance is vital for the sort of caravan we must form. It is worth remembering that God doesn't love us for what we are. He loves us for what we're going to be - which, as John's letter points out, *has not yet been revealed*. God's tolerance rests on his knowledge as Creator. That makes our tolerance towards each other an act of hope and worship towards God, whose fulness and eternity await us as the fulfilment of our making, and of all our lives. Until we see that in each other, let us be kind, and not delay its coming by our ignorance and unwisdom.

Fr Philip