

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

The Call To Hope

I always need to remind myself of the cheering fact that the old word *Lent* is the Anglo-Saxon word for *spring*. So Lent ought to put a spring in our step rather than calling for gloom or depression.

There May Be Trouble Ahead

Not *may be* but *is*. However, we would be as unwise to build our plans around trouble as we would be to ignore its possibility. Lent should be a time for returning to life, a true springtime in every department of our being. *That will require a miracle*, I hear you say. Good! At last we have something to pray for, a reason to turn to God. Lent must be a way of replacing *trouble* with *God* as the leading theme of our thoughts and feelings. Ask yourself this: on the scale between hope and anxiety, what percentage of your spiritual life is lived in hope, what percentage in anxiety? Keep the thought for next time you walk down the High-street and look into the faces you see - on all those people you don't know and will never speak to. What do you see etched on their lamps? Look at the faces that gaze through the windows of the bus stopped at the lights. Are they fresh-faced, cheerful members of a human race on its way to joy? Or do they look like the contents of a tumbrel on a day visit to Mme la Guillotine?

Donning The Habit Of Hope

The Church assures us that hope isn't a natural quality that comes, or doesn't come, with the genes, but a *virtue* - that means, a *strength* - which can be developed and which grows through exercise. What's more important, hope is the irreplaceable condition before good things can happen. The first essential for happiness is the real hope that it can come. We get rutted into the expectation of evil: bad experiences we've not managed to accept or recover from make us into pessimists. We also believe that *bad news you're expecting* is somehow better than *bad news you didn't expect*: so expect the worst, and you will, so to speak undercut the worst the future can serve up to you. If by some freak the news is good, you'll get a pleasant surprise. If it's the worst, you can say, *Just as I thought*. A carrion comfort, to be confirmed in one's pessimism! How can we prevent this accumulation of suffering, this sad luggage of failure and disappointment, from overpowering in us the

blessed hope that can save us, or at least open the door to a Saviour? This is a very serious question.

Face The Real Past

We have to work very methodically on our past, if we're to prevent it from dominating our future. We don't do this by denial, by cobbling together a future founded on trying to forget what happened, or by pretending *nothing* happened, in the past. We have to find a place from which we can safely contemplate past happenings, and come to as precise and truthful knowledge of them as we can. This means accepting the painful fact that we ourselves have been responsible for part of the suffering and loss. It means realising how much other people were responsible as well; but it will probably come about that we discover how to exonerate and to forgive, not only other people, but ourselves, for much of what happened in the past. When all is said and done, human beings are not just weak and foolish, but wounded to begin with, and further vulnerable as they go on. It isn't easy to rise from our disasters, even harder to cope with the inadequacies of other people. Much of the damage we've sustained happened before we knew, even in our making, or our infancy.

Lenten Language

When we have isolated the true proportion of suffering that is our fault, the liturgy tells us to say to God: *O see, in guilt I was born, a sinner was I conceived*. It isn't telling us evil news. It is only giving us a way to acknowledge a truth. The blissful relief which flows from stopping the pretence, dropping the lie, abandoning the faked façade! And this makes possible our return to genuine dignity, built on the truthful possession of our real self. We do not need to fear this admission: it's not God we are enlightening. We are accepting light for ourselves. The very words come to us in the Word of God, in the psalms. These holy prayers will guide our souls to him.

Liberation Is On The Way

Easter is death and resurrection. What is raised isn't the same as what was buried. Easter hope is for a new humanity in which evil has no power any more; Lent is the time to get used to hoping for it. *Fr Philip*