

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

You A Believer?

“Show me your works!” We know believers by what they do. That is why I’m so keen on the rule about Sunday Mass. Let me explain.

“United, Heart And Soul”

That’s one of the phrases the *Acts of the Apostles* uses about the first believers. They showed their unity sincerely: giving all they had into a common fund (yes, Christianity was communist at the beginning!), sharing their thoughts and prayers, and meeting on Sundays for the Breaking of the Bread. This last wasn’t a mere decoration on the other things: it was the part where they remembered *why* they did the other things: because they were obedient to their Lord, who was present among them. We know that they also often fell out with each other, and even Peter and Paul had a famous public disagreement on a vital principle; but they stayed united because they were united in Christ, not just because they liked each other (which was never always true).

United In Christ

This higher unity in Jesus, who had chosen so strange a variety of apostles, and who had a way of uniting lepers, demoniacs, Pharisees, prostitutes and tax collectors, is the great secret of Christianity, and the true heart of Catholicism, which calls all the world and his wife to belong to it, without distinction or difference. In the Catholic Church I’ve been delighted to find friendship with music-lovers, gourmands, readers and amateur art-critics, travel enthusiasts, and architects. I’ve met people whose lives are aglow with intelligence, poetry, style, and wit, people whose faces, figures, and lives are charged with immense and unforgettable beauty. I’ve known Catholics whose learning, humanity, and warmth have been gilded and lit from within by their faith in the eternal Lord. But I’m very lucky. I also know a lot of Catholics whose lives are disgraceful, or chaotic, or wrecked by addiction, immaturity, or criminal instincts. They peer out of the papers as scandalous public sinners and objects of prurient interest. They ring me up when they’re drunk or depressed, they bang on my door asking for instant access to my often depleted wallet, and call me a renegade and a hypocrite should I refuse. It’s sometimes hard to believe that I belong to them in Christ, and that they belong to me,

(not a reflection I much enjoy: but true all the same). Our Church is for all, and that hides an enormous well of consolation. We don’t find in our poor selves the compassion the world needs: it is there in Christ, and because we are in Christ we can call on his eternal gifts to supply our human poverty.

Second Sunday

Easter Day is the First Sunday in every way. Today is the Second Sunday of Easter, and it is the first heartbeat of the Paschal Church. This weekly beating of the heart reminds us of our membership of the risen Body of Christ, eternal and always full of grace for the world. To me this is the great sign of our faith in Jesus, that we return to the Church each week on the day of resurrection. During the week, of course, we may show some signs of belonging to Christ in that vineyard of work and sacrifice which is our job, our family, our circle of friends, the arena of politics, the world of charitable works. Maybe we will also show clear signs of our imperfect Christianity in meanness, cruelty, lack of imagination and the rest. But on Sunday, when we return to be with the others in the Body of Christ, we will once more be the real thing, the Church he died for; because he will be in the midst of us, and show us his hands and his side.

Receive The Spirit Of Faith

It is startling that, in the Fourth Gospel, Jesus bestows the Holy Spirit on his Church on Easter Evening (not, as in Luke’s account, after forty days with them, the Ascension to the Father, and the Novena of prayer before Pentecost). Perhaps when we describe that sequence of events it appears quite easily as a *liturgical* way of looking at Eastertide. John gives us an Easter which is all accomplished in one day: just as valid, given that the Paschal Mystery is a gateway to the timeless mystery of God, in which “one day is like a thousand, and a thousand days like one”. Our eye inevitably falls on Thomas today, who is I think the great beneficiary of this Second Sunday. He was hit very hard by the Cross. It was because he was present in the gathering of the Church on this day that he received his own encounter with the Risen Lord, and the healing of his life. Thomas gives him his highest title in the Scriptures: *My Lord, and my God!* Let Thomas teach us lifelong fidelity to the Sunday Mass!
Fr Philip