

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Emmaus

The very name conjures up so powerful a set of images and responses that it is hard to choose what to write

The Road Down

Coming away from Jerusalem is the worst setting. Have you ever found yourself accidentally returning from a holiday across grim acreage like North-eastern France: tired, broke, slightly the worse for wear from an over-blessed Last Supper the night before, and nothing to look forward to but a grey crossing of the Channel, followed by the break-up of the party, and two or three hundred lonely miles of British motorway, with two vast piles of post awaiting you? That's my own version - you'll have yours, I'm sure. The aftermath of a feast is bad enough: but one which cost you all your hopes is quite another. These two have every reason to be grim and cussed as they walk down the hill from a blighted Passover which has been exactly the opposite of itself.

Strange Meeting

The man who falls in with them is strangely fresh to their situation, and asks them to share their thoughts with him. It is in the telling that they open their wounds to him, adding a rude comment for good measure. His response however is not so submissive. He gives them a remark as cutting as theirs, and invites them to look again. And then - using nothing that they don't already know like the back of their hands - he offers them a completely new way of looking at what they have seen and not understood. Although they do not say so, each of them feels his heart lift more and more as the journey unfolds, until at last they are afire with what he is telling them. His departure from them is unthinkable: and they say their famous line, *Stay with us, for it is almost evening: the day is far gone*. So he agrees, and they enter into the blessed inn which is the scene of the great moment in the history of Emmaus, the inspiration for some of the greatest art the world has seen.

Banquet of Light

The evening table is slowly set, as it is in Mediterranean lands, and they find themselves suddenly more aware of him, now that they are facing each other, and not simply walking beside this extraordinary

fellow-traveller. They are sitting with him now as perhaps they had sat before his death: and we know that, despite his apparent carelessness about who he sat down with, he knew how to make his meals memorable. How are they "*prevented* from recognising him"? The word evokes frustration, a selective blindness: their eyes are held from it. Without doubt their inability is symbolic of the unlikelihood of the Resurrection. It's worth remembering that, although Christian piety has inserted the prediction of the Resurrection into Jesus' warnings about the Cross, the typical response to the discovery of an empty tomb was not to believe he had risen. He had been stolen, the body had been moved and put down somewhere else, helpless and hopelessly dead. Much less would these two meet him, walking with them on their sad journey. But this isn't enough. Something more stands in their light: Mark says he appeared to them *in alia effigie*, in a different form. Caravaggio's wonderful picture in London gives us a beardless, long-haired Jesus. What unveils him as the Risen Saviour is not his earthly countenance, or any human mark of resemblance: it is his sacramental gesture with the bread that opens their eyes.

Blessed Are Those Who Have Not Seen

This is, in fact, the experience we have in coming to Easter faith. We know Jesus, not by any earthly acquaintanceship; we recognise his presence by the doing of his deeds: his teaching, his healing, his uniting in love, his humble witness to his Father, his obedience, and above all by the sacrificial deeds that are enshrined in the Liturgy. He said of us: *the sheep follow their Shepherd because they know his voice; They never follow a stranger, but run away from him, because they do not recognise the voice of strangers*. The Church responds when the deeds of Christ are done in its midst. It will not respond to false teaching, to deceptive healing, to the attempt to unite on false premises, to people and ways that are not of God the Father. It is vital that any who would be shepherds in the Church be ready to lay down their lives, and ready to be made like Christ themselves, so that when they raise their hands to break the bread, the risen Christ may be glimpsed in them. May we be blessed in our shepherds! *Fr Philip*