

## THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

### All I Want Is A Room Somewhere

When Jesus says *I am going to prepare a place for you*, we may be tempted to think of our own little space among the many rooms in the Father's house. Maybe we could even begin imaginatively to install some home comforts and personalisation; how about a *sixty-minute makeover*?

#### **Beyond Time And Space**

But before getting lost in fatuous planning of cocktail-cabinets and shelves for the Crown Derby Tea-set, we might recall that the Father doesn't live in a house made by human hands, and indeed that the Father does not occupy space as we do. So "a room in his House" must be something mysterious to our understanding. I think it is interesting to speculate what sort of "preparing" Jesus has to do, before we can live with the Father. Immediately a much more interesting set of thoughts comes to mind: as human beings, living in one particular space and time, how can we share a divine life needing neither of these dimensions? We need radical rethinking: when we say that *Jesus ascends to the Father*, we are speaking of a human being acceding to the presence of God.

#### **The Coming Of The Son Of Man**

We have in the Old Testament a picture, drawn long before Jesus' birth: Daniel sees "one like a Son of man" coming on the clouds, being brought into the presence of God. Isaiah thought that, for a sinful man, the sight of God would be fatal. But this Son of Man is led into the presence of God to be loaded with empire, honour, and kingship, and authority over all who live. Jesus spoke of himself as the Son of Man. Perhaps he was already claiming to be the one who would lead our human nature to be with God. That he should do this by the Way of the Cross, carrying with him our conviction for blasphemy, is now clearly understandable. He is creating a space for us in God. The very thought of it is almost blasphemous, for anyone who knows the frailty of sinful flesh. Don't we secretly believe that we remain unfit to be with God? Unfit even to pray to him? I think we do, and that this is a major barrier between us and our salvation. God, after all, has cancelled the distance between us. Our feeling of unworthiness remains to be overcome. How will it be? Not by any denial of ours, or any accomplishment of ours. We

will not earn or deserve divine life, which can only come as a pure gift. We have to allow ourselves to be loved on God's terms, to let him say what we are to be and how we shall go there. Jesus says, *I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no-one can come to the Father except through me*.

#### **Pity The Poor Apostles!**

I always feel sorry for Jesus' friends, who follow him so stumblingly. They long to be the loyal receivers and collaborators he wants them to be; but he is so far beyond them, and sometimes they have to represent us, showing how mysterious to us is this Way, Truth, and Life. They would never share in his Way when it led to the Cross; and the reproaches that have been showered on Peter and his crew are surely undeserved. They were following Jesus into *forbidden* territory, as this very human carpenter-rabbi broke through the sacred barriers that separated humans from God. It must have been profoundly disturbing to their faith, even if none of them was a theologian; and when they saw the opposition of theologians and priests and scribes building up against him, it must have cost them all their loyalty to follow where he led. This explains why Jesus' prime demand was that they should believe in *him* as the only way to the Father, the Word from above, the true bread of life. He was not simply calling them to their ancestral colours as Jews, like Judas Maccabeus, or like Isaiah. He was taking them somewhere totally new. When they saw him crucified, they must have assumed that his "Way" had been a dead end.

#### **Easter**

It's impossible to define exactly what the Easter experience was for them. But it transcended all the defeat and the questioning provoked by the Cross, and filled them with a sense of hope and consolation which made them capable of trusting the Way even to death and beyond. It silenced their demand to make earthly sense, in favour of a new realisation which lifted them into the realm of divine truth, the "Kingdom of Heaven" of which he had spoken. In some sense they already knew that each one of them had been led into the presence of God: it would take the Church three centuries to find words to say that which no longer sounded blasphemous.

*Fr Philip*