

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

My Power Is Greatest In Your Weakness

I always want to write the most wonderful words about Easter, and I always find myself helpless before the task. It isn't an empty heart that's in the way, but the overwhelming fulness of the feast. I'd like to write something that would do justice to this abundance. If there's anyone who can't apprehend it, still lurking in the darkness of the Saturday when the Son of God rested in the tomb, *Fear not! The news is good!*

Spent Disciples

I think myself into the state of the Eleven; the very word reminds us what happened to the twelfth, Judas, and brings back the blunt fact of betrayal which defiled their share in the story. These men are a spent force, all their hopes in ruins, everything they had done spoiled and wrecked with the finality that only death brings. They are unreconciled to what has happened, their unity had so much been in Jesus: Peter especially must have been useless, reduced to tears of frustration and near despair. They probably had little or no compassion to offer each other, having nothing good to say about themselves. *Thomas was not with them when the Lord came.* Perhaps he was the most honest of all, and could not stand even the sight of his former colleagues without Jesus in their midst. Don't miss the divisive power of this guilt amidst their grief.

And A Lonely Woman

There is a similar outlier amidst the little group of women who followed to the end. Of the three Marys, we are given especial insight into the figure of Mary of Magdala. Not a conventionally pious woman, she *had had seven devils driven out of her* according to one Gospel. She had, in other words, already been to Hell and back. Is it this dubious distinction that separates her out, and brings her alone to weep at his grave as the rest of the world starts a new week? It is the day after Passover, but what do joy and liberation mean for her now?

All Those Who Mourn

It's because their faith had been so engaged in Jesus that these people feel so devastated. They are showing how much of their trust they had transferred onto him; now even religious consolation seems far from them, as if in losing him they had lost their faith. Two

of them are preparing for a disconsolate journey home, to an undistinguished little place called Emmaus. They aren't part of the inner circle of disciples, but they show the same symptoms as their leaders, devastated themselves, and out-of-sorts with each other; what would they do when they got home, except make a thin supper and call it a day? Turning in isn't easy when you're mourning; many a long sleepless night begins like that.

The Body Of The Lord

Emotionally it is hard not to think upon the entombed body of our loved one on the night after their funeral. What we loved to greet and look on, what we nurtured and fed and honoured, embraced and comforted, is now consigned to a lonely darkness and decay. In this meditation we aren't theologians, but fellow-mortals, flesh and blood; and Jesus had ended his life in such pitiable fashion that tears seem to be the only response.

No-one Is Excluded

From this, "the story so far", not one human being could feel excluded. We may all differ in superficial ways, in wealth, health, race or culture. But the elements of Easter are common to all humanity, and we can all find our place on this map. It is beneath all the human forces that brought about his death that we can sense *the mighty hand and outstretched arm* that separated earth from heaven, and divided the Red Sea in two, and at last frees his people from the power of evil. When Jesus bravely goes to his arrest, and condemnation, and execution, and the grave, he gathers to him as he goes all of us who are enslaved, all who are guilty, all who are rejected from life, and all who are dead - even dead in our sins. Peter's plan to save him was no more to the point than Judas' plan of treachery, or Caiaphas' plan to rid the world of him, or Pilate's weary rolling of the wheels of Roman power. The Paschal Mystery is, beyond all our understanding, God's work: the Father delivers his only Son to us, and Father and Son together enter into our wounded human family, and, with power both human and divine, reconcile us to themselves. Nothing in heaven or earth can supersede this fact. That is what stuns us as we encounter him in the dawn of Easter, and see and hear and touch in him the true hope of the world. This feast is ours. *Fr Philip*