

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Sunday Of The Passion

We should feel close today to the people of Jerusalem, who invented the liturgy of Holy Week. From very early days it was their pious custom to follow the story of the Passion, in the very places where it first unfolded. It was soon clear to the many pilgrims, who saw this happening, that the same patterns could be followed-out in other parts of the world; and so we find ourselves on this day modelling our entry into Church on the entry of Jesus to Jerusalem. He was the Messiah, coming to take possession of the City of David, coming to fulfil the liturgy of its Temple, to make there the sacrifice which would be the wedding between God and his holy people.

Meaningless Life

People are often overcome by a sense that their life doesn't mean anything. This terrible conclusion robs them of the power to go on. If they're young - and they often are - it terminates their education, blights their prospects and hopes, reduces them to awful self-contempt, and makes any sort of hopeless action possible. If they are sick, or disabled, or just old, it isolates them and fills them with despair, as their anguished minds join with their bodily frustration to call life itself into question. Sometimes they vent their pain on those who are there to help, so that many people can come to share in this dreadful state. Sometimes they stop eating, and lose the will to live.

A Minefield of Meanings

In the story of the Passion, we enter a world where meaning is *endlessly* revealed. Last year we read Luke's story of the entry into Jerusalem, where Jesus is told: *Master, check your disciples!* He replies: *If they kept silent, the very stones would cry out.* It's late to ask what sort of a Lent we've managed this year; but I can promise you that if you allow yourself to be caught up into the drama of Holy Week with the Church, you will never, ever again, be able to say that you find your life meaningless. I suppose we all have a real need to make sense to ourselves: and that includes answering a question from every department of our being. The mind needs to have a consistent reason for living, where life seems to respond to its questions, and to give cogent reasons for being as it is. The body is full of demands, and we need to have a basic sense of satisfactory physical life, as opposed

to something racked with pain or disappointment, void of pleasure or rest. Our emotions cry out for communion with others, needing to share an honoured and loving life where we can give ourselves, and receive others, generously. Our inner spiritual life demands the sense of aspiration and hope, freedom and space, a genuine faith in what is greater than we are. We need to know we are growing and travelling, not just enduring and being spent.

Don't Be Fooled By The Irony

In believing that there's true meaning to our lives, even if they look unconvincing and broken, we are at odds with the world - the real world, as it's called, where from the womb to the grave humanity is abused and dismissed: where unborn children are fetuses and dying people are vegetables, where the poor deserve their poverty and the rich keep their wealth, where lies are served up as promises and where they crucify the Lord of Glory. God is not mocked. The truth about the world will at last be spoken, and nothing will be lost. If we keep our eyes and ears open in Holy Week, we will see that Jesus never deviates from the path of faith, even when the human beings around him try to tell him that the road is closed. What happens then is all irony. Look, for an example, at the arrest of Jesus in the garden. The Fourth Gospel brings Romans and Jews together to do this, and they walk in darkness with artificial lights. They think they have sufficient force to capture their quarry: the full force of the Temple Guard and the Roman Army. When Jesus asks, *Whom do you seek?* - a deep question to a World Power and a Messianic people - they reply *Jesus of Nazareth.* That's irony. When he replies he simply pronounces the divine Name - *I AM* - and that's more irony. And then they stumble in the dark and are powerless to take him - more irony - and then he *orders them* to arrest him, and let the disciples go: and they obey him to the letter, and that's irony too: the human powers in the story can only do what Jesus tells them they can do. Over every detail, he still reigns. That is why he deserves to be called *The King*, which Pilate meant to be irony, and which turns out to be totally plain, simple truth. As he said himself: "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: as, later on, you will understand."
Fr Philip