

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

You Have Been Called

Let no-one doubt this, whatever message they may have received in the labour market or the educational certificate-race. You have been called into the world by God for some special purpose of his own, and your earthly career will lead you to a place where you will be offered the chance to make your contribution. When it comes, you will be quite irreplaceable, and your name will shine in sacred history if you are generous enough, and long-sighted enough, or innocent enough to give what God has put into you as your gift. Taking this view of human beings always amplifies the frame; taking this view of yourself lends a certain new excitement to the business of being alive.

I Met Someone Today

Every great story begins like that. Nothing is so powerful as meeting another person. It's possible to be deeply affected by a thing or a place: but people are without doubt the windows through whom we see visions, the doors which open and admit us into life. What lends a particular way of life its special relish is the degree to which it gives you access to other people.

Pleased To Meet You!

But simple proximity is far from enough. I always try to remember to cross eyebeams with whoever's on the till at the supermarket. So easily I forget, and unforgivably treat them as part of the till equipment. True, their contribution to my success as a shopper may be slight, even debatable (they take my cash!); but they're still people, and they still need to be greeted, smiled at and - yes - appreciated. This girl put a smart slide in her hair this morning, and offers to help me pack the groceries. She's in credit! Conversely, we can often pick up a distress-call from someone in a position like that: perhaps the mechanical, boring job is getting into their soul, and they've despaired of any trace of humanity coming their way for the next three hours. I can see myself selling champagne and Parma Ham with verve; but I try to imagine how I would be, picking up my fiftieth bottle of Coke or packet of veggiburgers. I feel sure that we don't do enough to give people their true value. Remember, real meetings are double blessings, and illuminate two people's day. Furthermore,

how on earth can you be so sure that your life isn't about to be changed, perhaps this very day, by an encounter so powerful that your previous views and plans will all melt down and be kicked into the past? Dante didn't wake up knowing he would meet Beatrice on the bridge; Paul hadn't the slightest warning of the moment when God revealed his Son to him. It's actually dangerous to assume that today will end as it began. God's call may break through my routine when I least expect him.

Here Are Your Free Gifts

Jesus' apostles are not sent out in weakness. He gives them *authority over unclean spirits, with power to cast them out and to cure all kinds of disease and sickness*. This power of healing and reconciliation must seem far-fetched and unreal to anyone who has no notion of being called, let alone being sent out with a mission. I'd invite you to suppose, for a moment, that God has chosen you to do this: to proclaim his reign over the dull world around you, to tell people that it does have a total and divine meaning, that nothing we lose or give or suffer or enjoy is irrelevant to the mysterious plan of the cosmos. You don't have to say what the meaning is: it's highly unlikely that you know; but firmly to believe that God is reigning over the world means believing that our meaning is in his mind, and will be revealed at the end of time. This is what gives us the power to stay with the cancer-patient and the bereaved family, the disappointed lover, the abandoned husband or wife, the failed businessman, the disgraced politician. "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done" undercuts all our dismay and grief, because what God wants is glorious and unimaginable, beyond our minds. To reel from the effort to understand is natural, and very depressing. To abandon the unequal task, in favour of unquestioning trust in God, is the greatest possible liberation and relief.

To Serve You Is To Reign

In our Baptism we are anointed as kings are, because our lives are to be lived, already, here and now, in the kingdom of Heaven in which we are at home. It is time for us to experience life on a new plane, and to start paying and receiving royal visits, with gifts, and honours, and divine grace.

Philip

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