

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

## The Twelve Apostles

He saw the crowds looking helpless; he felt compassion towards them because they had no shepherd; then he summoned the Twelve and sent them out to find lost sheep and give them good news in all their grief.

### Nothing's Changed!

How naïve we've been about human nature. When I was an idealistic teenager, we all cheered Harold Wilson into Number Ten, and watched John Kennedy take the White House, and thought the era of Edwardian gents like Harold Macmillan, and the old warrior Dwight Eisenhower, was about to give way to a new age. The Sixties! Everything was going to be new, bright and beautiful. Surely the Church was part of this: we watched our venerable old bishops - the English Hierarchy were especially old and fusty-looking at the time - blinking in Roman sun, astonishing themselves in the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican; and in lands where tyrannical régimes were in undisturbed power - like much of Latin America - Catholics started to look up expectantly, as the Church reached out to the world in a more loving way.

### Bang, Bang, Bang, You're Dead

Three years later, John and Robert Kennedy were gunned down, and then Martin Luther King. A newly-stern America began to be dragged into the machine of the Vietnam war that had caught its clothes. The hopes in the Church of the Council stalled as Paul VI seemed suddenly to age and lose his confidence. The same cold feeling grew in the Soviet Union: the Prague Spring was crushed in 1968 as Hungary had been in 1954, and we watched sinister men succeeding each other: Brezhnev, Andropov, Chernenko. Flower-power was revealed as drug-induced, and pop culture as a commercial scam; Olympic sport and even soccer sank into a morass of illegal substances and financial squalor, and politics was blackened by scandal. It was a worldly-wise and disappointed generation that watched the Iron Curtain fall, and a moment

of grace was quite lost; as John Paul II said at the time, the Capitalist West had little to offer the dead Communism of the East. There was a curious lack of enthusiasm for a new Millennium (how could it mean anything to anyone but a committed Christian?) and that ridiculous assembly in the Greenwich Dome symbolised the bankrupt spirit of a country with nothing to celebrate.

### Sheep Without A Shepherd

I feel that people who have been denied the experience of care and wisdom from their elders are very hard to reach. Those who love their parents and are loved by them grow up with open hands, ready to meet and greet others, and to consider letting others enter the calm centre of the heart. Those who grow up in fear, uncertain of their welcome into life, have locked doors. They're wary of admitting others into their hearts. After all, no-one else has ever been there, and it must be for a reason; perhaps no-one should be there; perhaps my parents avoided me for good reason; perhaps I'm unworthy of love or trust. Or perhaps the cold lesson they taught me was that it is a bad thing to let oneself be visited by others, perhaps it is so risky, that they wanted to make me self-sufficient, so that I would never have to go there. Once that pattern of distance has been established, the doors and windows painted up, the keys mouldering in a never-opened drawer, it's a heroic task to get through the defences. That, I think, is what Jesus saw in all those faces of "sheep without a shepherd" who looked up to him. His compassion for them is active. But note that his first response is to give them people - the Twelve Apostles - to speak to them. One of the earliest symbols of Peter's ministry is *a bunch of keys*. Get it?

### Freely Given

There are many ways to get into other minds: some violent and crude. Jesus insists that the Apostles offer the Gospel without strings attached and without violence. The Christian Church must listen to this with great attention, so that it avoids all kinds of

oppression, giving itself to the Lord's way of  
humble service.

*Fr Philip*