

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Rest, Peace, Joy

The words of Jesus: *Come to me, all who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest*, have never been so needed or so apposite as they are today. People are suffering and dying from the tension stored in their lives. It isn't just hard work, which we (wrongly) say never killed anybody: there's plenty to suggest we work less hard than our forebears in physical terms. It feels to me more like mental stress, an exhaustion that comes from knowing too much, and feeling overcharged with responsibility. Our lives are choked-up. Like the heart and arteries, clogged with deposits of cholesterol until no blood can get through, our emotional life is blocked with burdens and questions, anxious unaddressed fears and uncertainties.

Unshepherded Hearts

Perhaps we could say that our hearts are full of unquietness because we have lost many of the things that unite us as people. The most solid source of unity within the personality is the experience of love. Youth was once a good time to learn love, when the heart was unladen with the burdens of experience and mortgages. But now we grow up in debt; and there are great numbers, even of youngsters, who seem not to be able to give their hearts to anything; they find it hard to choose a career, hard to commit to a vocation, hard to commit to another person or to marriage. I find this a sad prospect. Maybe they're being offered too many different possibilities, and they find themselves sitting out their lives spoiled for choice; perhaps they're waiting for some overwhelming experience which will finally make sense of them. Without some overarching ideal or hope, the heart begins to disintegrate and distribute, like a river that is getting becalmed, no longer flowing with the speed and exuberance of its youth, and forming a delta of deposited mud that is neither stream nor sea. They have been told for two generations now that they have to make sense of themselves, that there are no rules for this, that they must find the meaning of life within themselves. I don't believe that, and I don't think anyone could do it. Why

should we throw away thousands of years of experience, on the principle that each poor little soul has to re-invent the wheel from scratch? Is it wrong or immoral to seek to inherit wisdom from the generation before?

Don't Ask Me, Ask Your Mother

But suppose the generation before feels as much disinherited of wisdom as the present one: what then? Where do we turn when our parents shrug their shoulders and profess ignorance? What a bleak prospect it all is! Last week the Director-General of the BBC, who is a Catholic, stated his belief that religion (and that, dear hearts, is what we're talking about here) is absolutely centre-stage even in modern Britain. He's right, even if for many people religion is the elephant in the drawing-room that everyone is furiously trying not to mention. You see, the reason why Jesus calls the overburdened to *come to him for rest* is precisely because he can tell them about the Father. You need the first half of today's Gospel before you can understand the second. We all need rest, peace, and joy: but we can't commercially order them in a catalogue, or sociably decide to bestow them on each other for Christmas - try as we might. These vital gifts are only to be found when we have discerned what we are here for, and given our hearts into that generous outpouring which unites them. Selfless love can only happen when we are possessed by the Wisdom we call the Holy Spirit. In him we can find the reason for all that is in us and about us, and in this all-encompassing wisdom we shall find our way to peace.

It's Never Too Late

Something deep inside us knows these things. We can hear the response half-formed, when the Gospel penetrates our defences, and the inner voices say *Amen*. We know that the King who entered Jerusalem on a donkey instead of a war-horse can teach us how to enter into life without violence and with active, powerful love. The best gift we can give our young people is to become their leaders in prayer.

Fr Philip