

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

I Want Justice!

I can distinctly remember, as a little child, being told to be afraid of the Last Judgment, and I know that this is something you can find expressed in many centuries of the Church's teaching and liturgy. Somehow I associate this with the old habit of capitalising His pronouns, as if He is an earthly Majesty Who likes His pronouns with a big H.

Dangerous If Crossed

It seems that our God was a God of love, but He was dangerous too. If you came at Him the wrong way He was liable to vaporise you. I guess that, because the world is full of ways in which a little child can unwittingly offend, we came to think of ourselves as walking a tightrope. It was so easy to offend Sister Vianney without intending to, we thought: so God must be the ultimate minefield, sorry I mean Minefield, where one false step means not just curtains but instantaneous detonation. In this context "Final Judgment" had about it the finality of hell. How could we pass an examination like that? How could one win? I remember the ludicrous and irreligious things we were told: were you told *chewing the Host* was wrong? I was. *Take this all of you, and let it melt....* such misunderstanding was endemic in a Latin-speaking, clerical, and supercilious church, where nearly everyone was made to feel out of place so that they'd not forget how privileged they were. I remember the legend that only priests could touch chalices. (I now know it was to save silver-polish, but we thought it was Divine Law. We thought everything was.)

What More Could I Do For You?

I began early to be impatient with that church full of by-laws. I was a bit iconoclastic, and liked things that were ordinary and unholy to appear next door to the Sacred. I liked the ox and the ass within three feet of the Incarnation and the bandit nailed up beside the Redemption. I liked the tax-collectors and sinners sitting down at the Lord's table. Jesus always seemed to me to have moved heaven and earth to prevent us making him into a visiting monarch. Why would we want to

push him back onto a pedestal, and force a crown onto his head, and drape him in earthly respect and cold awe?

Something New

Then I read Paul, who said *Christ emptied himself of glory, to become what we are*. Now, I thought, there's the heart of it. And yet *becoming what we are* cost him his life: we condemned him for it (the Jews say: *You are only a man and you claim to be God*). So the very thing that should have made him our brother was used to condemn him to death. I learned that being human isn't easy or common: it is a rare thing to meet a truly human being, and she might not be a happy human being when you find her. I learned that our holy story is full of human beings who are made to suffer by inhuman beings. Then I began to fear the judgment of humans more than the Last Judgment. At least the human beings can look for fairness from Jesus.

"Though Heaven Fall....

...let justice be done!" This old cry can't touch the Heaven that is Christ's Kingdom; but it may well bring tumbling down many a mockery of heaven that's been wished into being by humans. It will be an awesome thing to be judged by Christ. But the awe will be like the awe of the Manger, or the silence in the ears of the woman taken in adultery, or the shocking promise of one dying convict to another on Calvary. These things are blasphemies in the ears of unbelievers, but the word of mercy to the broken-hearted world. When we speak of God, let it be to proclaim his humble coming to us, and to welcome him in those who like him are poor, hungry, homeless and naked; when humanity is void of honours and dignities, it seems most like Jesus, who didn't have it in him to cling to equality with God. It seems being God is about letting go of who you are, and about being caught as you fall, and being welcomed in mutual love. Christ does that in eternity, and he did it on earth. He will welcome all who know how to imitate him, to

do it joyously in the Kingdom for ever. *Fr*
Philip