

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Filled, Fulfilled, Fulness

The concept of fulfilment is popular today. People long for “the fulfilment of their heart’s desire” with a new urgency. This is well expressed by concepts like “the American Dream” - the notion that a simple country boy can rise to be President, that the child of a backwoods rural family can lead the world in brain surgery. The *reality* may be that of James Thurber’s over-imaginative character, Walter Mitty, who constantly departs in spirit from his humdrum errands and chores, to become the heroic pilot who saves the nation or the submarine captain who wins the war. It is still good that people should dream dreams, especially in their youth. Fulfilment is not always an easy thing to achieve, and the downside is the possibility of disappointment and even bitterness.

What Are We For?

The great knack, I believe, is knowing how to fix our hearts on something which is going to come true. To long for the truth is always going to lead to fulfilment, *because the truth will out*. We would not wish to see a desire fulfilled which rested on a lie. It’s true that you can fool a lot of the people most of the time; but you can’t fool yourself permanently. Peace comes from making friends with the truth. The wonderful writer, Donald Nicholl, explained in his last book how he was having to come to terms with his inoperable tumour. He managed to realise that it had its own logic, its own inexorable truth, and that, if he wanted to make sense of his life, he would have to say yes to the death God had sent him: cancer was part of his human parcel, along with war, and Mozart, and Yorkshire Pudding. Donald refused to edit it according to any recipe of his own. His book was astonishing: but his death was a sublime experience for those closest to him. It all depends on what you decide we’re for. If each one of us is some kind of prototype of an animal trying to live forever, and that in a delirium of overwhelming delight, then every human life so far has been a dismal failure. But if the struggling, battle-torn face of a humanity that has suffered and endured all the wounds of disappointment and regret is really the aim in view, if somehow all these smashed eggs of ours are making up an omelette, then there is a wisdom to be discerned that is beyond our earthly sight. I don’t think we are here for any purpose of

our own. I think we are here for a plan of God that isn’t simple enough or plain enough for our conjecture. This, I think, is why I am anxious to get to God. I want to see what it has all been for.

All Filled With The Holy Spirit

Saint Aelred was an English Cistercian at the lovely Abbey of Rievaulx (Ryedale) in Yorkshire. He wrote about what we are for. He said: *God has created between himself and his creatures...an all-embracing friendship, in which each one loves the other as himself. The result is that, as each one rejoices in his own happiness, so he finds joy in the happiness of his neighbours; the blessedness of each individual is the blessedness of all, and the sum total of the blessedness of all will be enjoyed by every individual.* This reminds me of the words of Jesus: *I have told you all this, so that my joy may be in you, and your own joy may be full.* That seems to me to be a good idea of what we might be for. And it also seems to be a good definition of what it will be like when we are filled full of the Holy Spirit, until there is no room in us for anything that falls short of his fulness. It’s been my experience that plenty - if it’s understood correctly - leads to generosity. It’s knowing that you have enough that makes you free to give to others. The beauty of it is that the sense of wealth doesn’t reside in bank-statements but in the innermost heart of us. If you’re blessed at the very heart, you will be able to bless others, and to be a blessing. What’s more, you won’t worry any more about things like bank-balances; they won’t have the power to make you mean and heartless any more.

What You Loose On Earth

Throughout the Easter lectionary we’ve read the apostles’ stories about the bolts shooting open on their prisons, and the chains falling from their wrists. The coming of the Holy Spirit undoes the prison locks for all of us. We should take the moment seriously, and bring out the hidden shackles we’ve worn for years, and present them to be undone, so that we can live in freedom, no longer slaves to our past. Then we can pray with full hearts the prayer of Christ: *your will be done!* When God has freed us, it is to bring us to our divine inheritance, in whose enjoyment we can at last be generously alive. *Fr Philip*