

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

“I Will Believe!”

When we say the word “faith” we can mean one of two things. The first is what we mean when we talk of “the Catholic Faith” - a huge system of human discourse, witness, and activity: principles of life, habits of thought, theoretical statements about God, humanity, the world, and the Church: buildings, works of art, music, treasures of liturgical practice and spiritual experience: monasticism and missionary activity, evangelism, the practice of good works and kindness: the lives of the saints in all their variety: and the massive human community of those alive today who profess one Catholic faith in union with the pope. How some of us love all of that! And how some people misunderstand it! And how it leaves some others totally cold! It is a great powerful stream of history, and like all other historical facts it evokes great positive and negative feelings and responses.

The Gift Of Faith

But the word *faith* can mean something else: a much more personal fact of a human being who resolves to trust God, even if, especially if the facts seem not to favour such trust. We call this faith a *gift*, because it is great among the many gifts that make human beings so wonderful to be with: courage, wisdom, hope, affection, generosity and the rest are all gifts which make us grateful for one another; and their absence is a burden we all have to bear together. Faith is very important, because it turns a switch between positive and negative attitudes to life. If my friend has faith, I am upheld myself. If we lose our trust, we disable each other; if we lose our trust in God, our courage is limited to what little power we have to give meaning and purpose to our lives. But the Church believes at least two more things about faith: firstly, that faith is a direct gift to each individual from God: Jesus said: *No-one can come to me unless the Father draws him*. This idea of faith as a personal gift to each of us from God is very revealing. It means that our trusting in God is responding to a personal invitation from God. The second thought is that faith is a virtue - a strength; and strength is part of us, and grows

greater through exercise. In other words, faith is part of the area where we have choice, where we make a decision. Every time we decide to trust God we build up the power of faith in ourselves. The decision to pray is an exercise of faith instead of doubt. The decision to forgive is a choice for healing, against strife. The decision to give is a choice of sharing instead of refusal. Faith is the voice which turns the switch habitually to the *yes* position instead of the *no*.

Resurrection And Faith

The resurrection of Jesus made that change to the positive disposition of our lives the default attitude to all things. It makes possible the great *Amen* - “let it be so!” - which keeps our heads up and our eyes open. There is no limit to the power of faith to carry us over flood and through fire. And we should take the decision to activate it. The realisation that it is a gift doesn’t mean there is anyone who has it refused to him or her. Why would God create any individual *in order that they should be lost*? Jesus said: *Everyone the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I shall certainly not reject*.

Believing Thomas

Today is Thomas’ day, and I think it is the feast of the Christian Sunday, because it is the first Sunday after Easter, and the disciples all met together once again. I’m sure he could be the patron saint of anyone who sometimes comes unwillingly to Sunday Mass. When you override your unbelief, or weak devotion, or absorption in anxiety, or weariness, or sheer grief, and meet up with the Church, Jesus does not fail to come back to meet you, to remind you of his victorious wounds, and his continuing joyous, generous life. That’s a decision you made. It will help you to make it again in the future, and to make room for the Resurrection in all its grace and power. If the noise you made wrenching the body into obedience was like the parting of the Magdeburg Hemispheres, don’t worry! The

love of Christ is the one that overcomes all
obstacles. I will trust him.

Fr Philip