

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Why The Father Loves Jesus

The love of Christ the Shepherd is our hope for the future. He is our guide into eternal life, and we belong to him and to the Way he showed us. One of the saddest features of our life is the experience of *misplaced trust*. You would think we'd be wiser than we are, in view of the endless betrayal that comes our way: politicians, manufacturers, workmen, managers, friends, lovers, spouses, parents constantly display untrustworthiness, and we continue to be shocked and amazed, as if we were experiencing it for the first time. Whom, we ask wistfully, can we trust?

I Lay Down My Life

Most of our relationships have a mutual payoff; the exceptions being people like lifeboatmen who risk (and sometimes lose) everything to help others. Sometimes our intimate family relationships take a dramatic turn which lead us into sacrifice; usually they too are confusingly mutually beneficial. Between husband and wife, it easily happens that tenderness and gratitude and grace silently depart, to be replaced by a feeling of dead enslavement and trappedness. If *all* our relationships were like that, we might never know what it means to *lay down one's life*. It is in speaking of the rôle of the Shepherd that Jesus throws in, almost as an afterthought, the startling words: *The Father loves me because I lay down my life*. Deceptively simple, but it is a precious glimpse of the inner life of the Trinity, from which spring our creation and our Redemption. As our Lenten meditations led us to see, that is truly the way the Father loves the Son within the Trinity; Jesus makes it true in his human life and we get to see it, to watch it happen. Those who think the Romans or the High Priests defeated Jesus at Calvary should look at these words: *no-one takes my life from me: I lay it down of my own accord; and as it is in my power to lay it down, so it is in my power to take it up again*. This astonishing explanation of the Cross is central to our understanding of Christ. His death is an act of power, not weakness: he has power over himself, and he uses it to be

totally generous. That shows us what God is like in terms no human being can mistake.

Other Sheep I Have

This is not a human relationship, restricted to one other or to a favoured few. It is divine love, and it is for *all* whom God has made. This is territory we have yet to explore, because we've needed the Church to be a culturally congenial institution. It looks European, it feels central to our own limited culture: the English Village, with its green and its ancient Church and its flower festival and maypole. In fact these things may blind us to the boundless destiny of Christian love: great enough for all humanity, greater than the whole universe. Did those who met Jesus in Palestine sense that tremendous love? I believe they did. It was that universality of love that drew people to him like a magnet, and repelled them at the same time: he was all love, but it frightened you as well. "There are others...I must be their shepherd too..." We have to share Christ with all who live, we may not confine him in our culture and our religious experience: how wonderful that he is already an Asian, not a European: how much readier that makes us to find him different from us, always teaching us, leading us beyond our narrow understanding! Even when we stand in Piazza San Pietro, and listen to the German accents of the Pope, we know that our Master spoke a far different tongue and lived in a time and place that meant he never saw Rome or gazed upon *these clouded hills*. We live in a world that seeks its glory in acquisition, possessions, powers, dominion over all others. Christ died in a similar world, that was being torn like a bone in a dogfight. But the destination of his Gospel is to gather us all, and others *not of this fold*, into a community which is built, not on acquisition, but on surrender: on his surrender of a Jewish life in the first century. Forgettable? Yes; a tiny fragment of the history of Judaea, of Asia Minor, of our world, which still carries the key to the whole world's meaning.

Fr Philip