

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

## Keep Faith

Jesus was faithful to his Father and faithful to his fellow-humans. In this way he becomes the Bridge-maker between God and Humanity (the Latin word *pontifex* is the title of the High Priest of Rome; it was held by the emperors, and passed to the popes, in the English form *pontiff*).

### A Suitable Case For Treatment

It's hard to keep faith with someone who is not quite right. We've all had the experience of dealing with someone who's emotionally unbalanced, physically or mentally ill, or in the grip of some huge reaction which has cost them their right judgment. We've maybe known people who are drunk or drugged, people in the aftermath of a family breakdown, victims of crime, or people who have ruined their relationships by their own derelictions or vices or mistakes. It's hard to trust them, hard to tell them the truth, hard to communicate with them honestly and openly. Can we say that we are keeping faith with them unless we are prepared to take a risk? When we watch Jesus, we know that we are watching the divine patience at work with us: God takes the ultimate risk, and we repay him with the ultimate refusal that we can devise - the Cross. God shows us that he has even thought ahead about that, that his willingness to entrust his Son to us even accepts that response. We call God's demonstration of that faithfulness *the Paschal Mystery* - Easter. It is what we are celebrating in these beautiful days of Spring. God shows us that his new Covenant will endure even our worst failure to understand. That is why we call Christ the divine Physician, the ultimate healer, and the High Priest of God's religion.

### Remain In My Love

Today Christ asks us to keep faith with him; how do we go about that? It doesn't come easily to us, because we are unbalanced partners in the Covenant - and always have been. The prophet Hosea calls Israel an unfaithful wife, and depicts God as insisting on his love for her, devising ways to woo her and remind her where she belongs. Hosea

also describes us as callous and forgetful children, who turn their backs on their old father and go their own way; and God sits by his cold fireplace, wracking his brains to think how he is going to restore our belonging to him. For a moment he fears that the only way will lie through disaster, the return to Egypt and to slavery, which may turn us back: and then he says those amazing words: *No: I cannot do it to them; my whole being revolts at the thought; for I am God, not man: the Holy One in your midst! I will not come to you in anger.* That is God remaining in love with us. We must learn to remain in the love of Christ.

### We May Be Unfaithful: God Never Is

God cannot deny his true self, even if he has made us capable of doing exactly that. It is our dubious privilege that we can frustrate the plan God has made for us. We shall in the process plunge our life into depths of misery: but that is the price of our freedom, and even that is a proof of God's fidelity to us. He will never overrule us, even at our craziest, most negative pass. It is up to us to respond with generosity and trust, even when the way seems to cut us off from our earthly motives and rewards: there is an element of obedience here which even Jesus (*not my will, but your will be done*) had to offer. *He learned to obey through what he suffered.* We shouldn't be surprised if the same is asked of us. After all, our salvation doesn't rest on our choice of it; we would almost certainly choose wrongly. Rather, it is Christ who chooses us, and this promises us that our lives will come to fruition beyond our imagining.

### I Call You Friends

Those who give themselves to this obedience are not left as pupils or servants. They become friends of Christ, who are admitted to the knowledge of the mind of God. This is part of inheriting the divine life itself: it is what makes being a Christian so exciting a prospect. Let us not model our minds on *our* best ideas - not even our love for God: but on

the love God has shown to us, in sending his  
Son to be our Saviour.

*Fr Philip*