

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

## Lent Is Here

Of all the fortunate coincidences that bring Britain blessing, few are so happy as the miserable weather which always seems to accompany the beginning of Lent. If our weather travelled in perfectly regulated gradation, we should last week have been gladdened by a warmth which was one-third of the way to midsummer. Instead, February was itself: and we find a gratuitous burst of snow on high ground, and a greyness of sky which does justice to Ash Wednesday. It's nearly impossible to believe that by the end of Lent we shall be awash with blossom and the daffodils will have shot their bolt. But that's the truth of the matter.

### Lent Lilies

Daffodils have a strong, cheerful nature that makes them right for Lent. They breathe sunshine and resurgence. Let them teach us about the spiritual and moral Springtime which graces their season in the Church. Lent has some straight talking for us, but also some gloriously transcendent gifts. As I sat having my locks shorn for penitence last week, amid the usual repartee for which our excellent Barber is famous, the door opened, and chat turned suddenly serious. How are you? *Not good*. Not good? How did you get on at the hospital? *I've got cancer*. Any treatment? *I'll have to go to Nottingham*. You could hear the decency in the voice, the apprehension, the suspicion that the game was up: *That's how it goes*, he said: that's how life goes. Some of us fell silent, not knowing what to say. But the season of faith we have just entered upon *does* know what to say. It welcomes truth like this, faces it realistically, and summons up courage and trust to meet it. You'd know that from the ashes on Wednesday. The gift we will receive from this yearly pilgrimage grows in meaning the longer we live, and the more we have to cope with. The spirit of Lent eats fear and anxiety, because it leads us to make sense of death, of sin, of the worst life can throw at us. So let no-one enter upon Lent gloomily or meanly. It is the setting of a table which seems frugal and sober: but only so that God

can fill its empty spaces with a wealth of festival which can't be exhausted, which will be more than enough for the whole human family. Centuries ago we would have been near the end of our resources, wondering anxiously if we would get through what's left of winter without incurring a famine. Such a banquet would seem beyond all hoping.

### So What's Good About The Weather?

Well - if the spring seems to be a distant dream, the joy of Easter seems far more unlikely. If our outer form finds itself perished with cold and crying out for comfort, the inner person too may be found to shiver, doubt, and cringe a bit. But the time will unfold, and with it the warmth and light, the renaissance under the soil, the return of hope will lift hearts and minds, and we shall put forth shoots and lift up our heads. The world itself will speak to us of the opening of the tomb, and it will help us to go there.

### Holy Thursday

Let me turn your mind to "the night he was betrayed" - the Thursday of Holy Week. As we come to Church - and please let us fill the Church that night: it is the greatest privilege to be there - it will be in that slightly unaccustomed purple light: an evening in the Spring. Those evenings seem strange, slightly magic: the sun has set, but the sky is still alive with returning life: and then, of all evenings, we feel ourselves to be on a threshold. The mystery of the Paschal Feast is beginning to unfold for us, and we are caught up in its power as, with the silent disciples, we watch Jesus wash our feet, telling us *Now you do not understand what I am doing for you. Later you will understand*. By all means let us take those Lenten steps which lead us there - fasting, praying and giving; but let us do something special this year, and bring with us all the people we can persuade, bully, kidnap, and beg to come. To take our place at the Lord's Supper, to go with him in the evening light up the Mount of Olives: to begin the story of the world's Passover from darkness

to light - this is what we shall be about. We  
all need to be there.

*Fr Philip*