

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Welcome To Faith!

This month we are going to begin a series of evenings, designed to welcome people to the world of Catholic faith. It's aimed at people who are interested in Christianity, and who would like to know more. If it works, it will show them that Christians don't have horns or haloes, or two heads to put them on. It will help people to make and find friends. If you are a committed Catholic, it will give you a good atmosphere in which to share your experience and belief. If you're full of questions, you will certainly find others who share them, and you might even find some possible answers. If you've become a bit feeble in your belief, it will give you a tonic. It should refresh the entire parish to have this happening, and if you're generous, the harvest might be startling.

A New Start

Every parish needs a new beginning, and this is why we used to have Parish Missions from time to time. People would come together each evening for a week, and listen to some teaching and say some prayers. After a few days the priests giving the Mission would go away, and things would return to "normal". I would like to see something more than that happening: we live at an historic crossroads, and we must take the grace God gives us at such a moment. We're surrounded by people who have no known faith, and are "like sheep without a shepherd": no-one seems to care about them or take notice of them. Well, we are ordered by God to take care of them, and to offer them our faith. It is a stupendous gift, and we shall do all we can to share it and show how much we ourselves treasure it.

"Who Will Take Part?"

If that's your question to me, I'm asking it of you. Everyone, you see, can be involved. If you have faith, you're important and we want to see you sharing it with those less blessed. If you have doubts, we want you to come and share them with us; you won't be alone. If you have questions, you're vital! You don't need any special gifts of eloquence or intellect. All that's required is honesty and willingness to share the whole experience of faith. Do you think people aren't interested in faith? Indeed they are: despite the contempt of the media and the frequent mockery of belief as superstitious nonsense, most people are intelligent enough to understand that *it is*

human to believe; in fact, without believing in something that's greater than us, we lose our bearings and become a danger to ourselves and others - loose cannon rolling around on the deck of the human ship. Society itself, without shared beliefs, can become a chaos of competing selfishness. The Church has vast experience of human nature, and has always been watchful for the health of the human community. To treat people's faith as a no-go area, where each of us has to make up a religion from scratch, is a stupid policy. Our medical knowledge has often failed us in the past; but we wouldn't abandon medical knowledge, and let every generation fight for its own life. We do our best to learn from political history, and agricultural lore, and every kind of science; so why throw away our precious religious tradition so casually, and allow our religious understanding to revert to savagery, rather than let the Scripture and the Church offer their gifts? Let's be reasonable!

"All Wars Come From Religion!"

I don't agree with this old bromide: but it has this much truth in it: that if religion goes bad (and like every human faculty, it needs care *not* to go bad) it is capable of releasing massive powers for evil, just as it can release mighty powers of love and sanctity. What you can't do is to ignore it or deny it. It's there, and it's real, and it's in all of us. No programme of personal development or education, no plan or vision for the life that lies ahead of us, can be sound if it leaves out the religious dimension. Lord Russell was a great philosopher; but his view of the world was irrevocably stunted by his inability to enter the religious dimension of human understanding. I'd like to think that my way of living my life, with all its failings and weaknesses, will at least have a window open to the Creator who called me into being. I'd also like to think that, if we stayed faithful to our religion, we could reach the point where we saw how futile war is as an instrument of politics, and the voice of Christ could be raised consistently in the cause of peace. It's only when religion is polluted and misunderstood that it can be recruited to any earthly colours. So if we say: *All wars bear witness to bad religion*, I'll agree wholeheartedly: so let's make our religion good, with all our might! Fr Philip