

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

## What Do People Most Need Today?

If you were a Fairy Godmother these days I guess you might get a bit cynical. If you appeared to the average Jack or Jill mooching in the sidestreets of Lincoln, and told them they had ten seconds to name three wishes, what d'you think they'd choose? In my 33<sup>rd</sup> year as opener of Presbytery doors, I can say that the great majority of the strangers who appear to me want nothing but the scanty contents of my wallet, to which they assume they have privileged access. If I raise the question of *why* they're homeless, penniless, jobless, hopeless and loveless, I'm treated as a mean scrote who's into strange and cruel methods of torture. The one certain way of keeping things peaceful is to empty my wallet into their hands, which brings a smile to their lips, and a gold star (in their internal Good Presbytery Guide) against my doorbell. This is one form of service that will certainly increase my relevance as a priest, and soon the world will be beating a path to my door.

### I Said "Need" Not "Want"!

I wonder what doctors are taught in GP school: always to give people what they need and never to give them what they want? The steely grit needed to refuse useless antibiotics must be hard to acquire; and I know that any GP will have people crowding in who have no intention of stopping smoking or drinking or overeating, and no plans to take exercise in the fresh air, and just want an expensive miracle drug to restore them to perfect health. How can we help people who don't want to face their real needs, and just want us to reinforce their prison bars?

### Jesus Knew How

Jesus, in today's Gospel, sees a large crowd of people seeking his help. His response is to *teach* them. That, you see, is what they really needed; and because he is the teacher of mankind, *they let him give them what they needed*. They knew he was to be trusted, and so they let him teach them. It was the truth and the shining love in him that earned him the right to do this. They sat and listened: even as they grew physically hungry; as long

as he continued, they listened. That's what real authority is like. It comes across as pure love, and people accept it.

### Doom For The Shepherds

Unfortunately there's little authority about today. The world we live in is wearing out its priests and doctors and nurses: they call it *compassion fatigue*. There are programmes to help carers *not* to get involved with their patients or clients, not to be overwhelmed or submerged in the sorrows they're trying to heal. As a culture we try to ignore the pressure from the poor world - poor so that we can be so rich. In a society where we've poured billions into the NHS and social services, many people are only just staying afloat; and the voluntary sector is labouring. It seems that doom has already stricken this world's shepherds, and they are looking green about the gills. Perhaps we're trying to do it all wrong. Surely we should be asking basic questions about what people really *need* the most. I believe the true poverty of our times is spiritual, certainly not material. Obsessed with material solutions, we aren't even touching the real issue. *He began to teach them at some length....*and they listened fascinated. The miraculous feeding was only an incident, compared to this miraculous listening to the word of life.

### What I Need Most

If I want to be a shepherd to anyone - to my parishioners, to my spouse, to my children, to my school - I must be holy. I must belong to Christ myself, and be at home with God the Father; I must breathe the Holy Spirit myself, and breathe forth the Holy Spirit when I care for them. Any other gifts I have are just incidentals, there to illuminate the miraculous gift of the love of God. If we can't give that, we don't deserve to care for anyone, and they will always know it. Do we need more security cameras? Policemen? Prisons? Laws and prohibitions? I think not. We need a human heart where God is at home: we need holiness in our hearts. We can't fake it, and it is the only answer to our need. *Fr Philip*