

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Make-Your-Mind-Up Time

In John's Gospel there is a theme of the Hour of God (called *kairos* in Greek) - the decisive moment, when the die will be cast. At Cana Jesus says *My Hour has not yet come*; and at the end of the Gospel, as the Passion is looming, he says *Now the Hour has come* - and the evangelist explains that *the Hour had come for him to pass to the Father*.

The Hour Of Judgment

If there is a decisive hour for Jesus, there is also one for us. We are presented in our lives with a moment of decision, when we make our choice about Jesus, and the meaning he has for us. Sometimes it may be very dramatic, and those who decide may refer to it afterwards as "the Day I became a Christian" or "the Day I decided not to believe". But I suspect it is much commoner for the hour to pass unnoticed; people don't remember this all-important moment, because they think so little of spiritual matters, and make a priority of practical things. Maybe they relegate Jesus Christ to the back burner, telling themselves they'll think about religion when they get bored enough to have nothing better to do.

Choose Today Whom You Will Serve

The Israelites have conquered the Promised Land, and they meet at Shechem to parcel out their new territory amongst the twelve tribes. Joshua presents the Israelites with a dramatic decision, and the people rise to the challenge, making a solemn commitment to serve the austere, invisible, imageless God of their Fathers, and not the very earthy and rather titillating fertility idols of their new land and its new, agricultural way of life. Amid the fertile farms and small cities of their settled existence, they vow to keep faith with God whom they had sensed in the wild deserts through which they had wandered. It would cost them a great spiritual effort to keep the faith. Many would fail; but the prophets kept rising up, their nomadic hearts ready to denounce the temptations of wealth and possession, and to remind the people of the God of Abraham, who said *leave your people and your father's house, and come to a land I will show you*.

What About You?

When the Jews have understood the massive claim of Jesus to have come from God, they

are shocked beyond belief. It seems to them like a blasphemous claim; He doesn't say he brings a divine message, like a prophet. He claims divine authority for *himself*; and no human being can claim divine authority for his whole personality. That is what Jesus claims when he says *I AM the bread from heaven*. In particular they are shocked by his ordinariness; in the other Gospels it all happens in Nazareth, and they say: *We know his parents, and his family; where does he get all this eloquence from?* - and they won't accept him. This is the moment of judgment for those who were fed by Jesus, who crossed the water to follow him, whom he has told to seek for bread from heaven, and to whom he has offered himself and his teaching as "bread from above". Now they are grumbling and anxious about what he has told them, and he is absolutely firm about it. There's no attempt to temper his message, to express it in a more acceptable way, to make it seem less shocking. He is perfectly satisfied with the way he has told it, and they can be in no doubt of his meaning; this is indeed the issue they must decide about. There's no way for them to accept him as a good man, but not what he claims to be. It is all, or nothing. For many it is too much, and they go off, shaking their heads.

Why Jesus Insists

Jesus doesn't back down before this division, this apparent failure and loss. It is the price he has to pay for telling the truth; and the truth will seal his death-warrant before the Sanhedrin. But Jesus will still say to Pilate: *I came to witness to the truth, and all who are on the side of truth will listen to my voice*. The corollary, *all who are deaf to the truth will refuse me* is easy to fill in. He accepts their loss today, as he will accept their condemnation of him, their sentence of death. It is all one act of witness, and he cannot avoid its consequences. If we don't believe him when he says *I have come down from heaven*, we lose the gift of salvation, and reconciliation with the Father, that is our one hope. It really is a life and death decision for us - today, just as it was two thousand years ago. As there are those who cannot accept him, there is also Peter, who says: *You have the message of life; we believe; we know you are the Holy One of God*. This is the creed of the People of God. *Fr Philip*