

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Use It Or Lose It

Faith has to be active or it's not faith. Don't let me hear any more nonsense from these anonymous Christians who never go near Church or Sacrament, and then claim to be Catholics because Grandma was a big Legion of Mary person and Monsignor used to come for a cup of tea. Their complacency may crumble when they hear the words *I tell you solemnly, I do not know you!* I tremble before the words of Ezekiel: *If the righteous man decides to abandon goodness, and copy the godless ways of the wicked, is he to live? He will most certainly die!* Faith is like breathing; if a day comes when you decide to have a few hours off, it can be rather serious.

“Who Do You Say I Am?”

When Jesus asks this question of the Twelve, it is because he thinks it's time they made a commitment, a real decision. Peter rises to the challenge, and says the words that have been unthinkable forming in the slow minds of these simple men. In Mark's Gospel he is greeted by no blessing, no grand promise from the man he has called *Messiah*. Instead he is told in no uncertain terms to keep silence. Then, into this atmosphere which has been cranked up to concert pitch, Jesus delivers the bombshell: the first prediction of the Cross. Peter has said something no-one has said before; now Jesus does the same. Ask yourself: which was the most shocking? Instead of getting a prize for divine insight, Peter is called a fearsome name for dreaming that he might alter the agenda for the Christ. Faith is sometimes hard. You take a step forward, and you're greeted with an even more difficult challenge. So there is no calm plateau, no resting-place for faith. There is always more to be accepted, more to learn, and a new kind of trust to be given. Let us never think we've arrived, and that we can forget about the Way of the Cross. It isn't enough that we keep on with our Mass and avoid arrest by the Serious Crime Squad. We have praying to do, and deeds to do that flow from our listening to God: *The Lord has opened my ear; and I have not resisted him.*

How's The Vocation?

Each of us has been summoned by God: if we hadn't, we shouldn't be here in his world. God does nothing accidental or redundant. He has plans for us! For us, life is responding to this calling of God, using the space he has

given us to reflect his glory, to write his name on the history of the world in our own hand. What has he given me to do? What does he mean by making me this person, and giving me these years, this day, this place in his world? What does he mean by bringing me to Lincoln, to St Hugh's, to this precise moment? Some of us have moments when we've suddenly known the answer, when we have been, and felt ourselves to be, the right person in the right place at the right time; and that may give us a glimpse of what it is to sense our vocation. Even as you say it, however, you know that the tough, unrelieved slog where you felt at odds with your surroundings, hopeless at your job, down-hearted with your personality, out-of-sorts with your health, blasted in your plans and a thorough pain to your friends, that you may be accomplishing the work you were put on the earth to do. I don't suppose the Passion was a very fulfilling experience for Jesus of Nazareth. But his faith in his Father alone burned brightly in that dark place.

Lose It For My Sake

I wonder at the words of the Gospel today: we are to lose our lives in order to save them. If you cling to your life you lose it; if you lose it for the Gospel, you save it. There is a kind of art, therefore, to the saving of life: you lose it if you try to keep it, and you lose it if you decide to give it; but if you cling to it now, you lose it for eternity; and if you let go of it now, you keep it for eternity. It seems that eternity is a prize which demands taking a risk. We must make sure that, when we “lose our life”, it is done with completely opened hands, as it was said of Jesus: *He was equal to God, but decided not to cling to his glory.* That means a daily struggle against the urge to possess, to achieve, to count our winnings. If we glory in our own good works, what have we lost? These prizes will drown us with their weight; let go of them, and be saved. The Gospel asks us to take up the Cross, that surgical tool which will sever us from all earthly rewards, and free us to belong to Christ. That is a vocation which sounds in all our ears, and whose accomplishment will unite us without exception. In truth, all men and women lose their lives at last: the percentage of us who die is still 100. But if you lose your life for Jesus and for the Gospel, God will be God for you. *Fr Philip*