

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

His Will For Us

Here I am, says Jesus, I am coming to obey your will. "Obeying the will of the Father" is a great way of thinking about proper human life - the Father being Jesus' Father, and our Creator. We come to do the Creator's will; he comes to do his Father's will. And what is this will? This will was for us to be made holy by the offering of his body, made once and for all by Jesus Christ.

How Can We Be Made Holy?

We are made holy, not by anything we do, but by something Jesus does. Being made holy means being completely given to God, so that all the space we take up is full of grace and goodness, full of love (God is love). To be holy is marvellous and exciting; it is to be superhuman and intensely alive. Let me repeat: it isn't achieved by us, it's done by Jesus. So don't get all exhausted and depressed. This is the ultimate divine *gift*, not another square-windowed envelope full of demands for early payments.

How Does It Feel To Be Holy?

How does it feel to be loved? It feels warm, calm, but very alive, sensitive, accepting of oneself. It feels blessed, with a blessing so powerful that we are able to bless others. This overflowing beatitude is what Jesus promises when he says *Give, and there will be gifts for you - a full measure, pressed down, shaken together, and overflowing, poured into your lap: the standard you use will be the standard used for you.* The lovely result of this gift is that we are given the grace to be selfless: to be made free in ourselves is to be able to give ourselves just as generously. But our good deeds are definitely in answer to the deed of God, in making us his own. That's the order it goes in: God's love for us, then our love.

"I Don't Want Your Sacrifices!"

Can this be true? God says that he takes no pleasure in the offerings commanded in the book of Leviticus, all those reparations for sin. But what about our own sacrifices? All the ways we try to forget ourselves and live for others: all the ways we try to give up our own pleasure and possessions for his work: do these mean nothing to him? Not at all: but if we think these are our "throwing six to start", our entrance-ticket to the Kingdom of Heaven, then no! He takes no pleasure in that

kind of religion: *I will hurt myself, and then God will be good to me.* If there is any trace of that in us, we must extirpate it mercilessly. Remember last Sunday's message: *I want you to be happy, always happy in the Lord.*

The Pouring-Out Of Life

The heart-shaking mystery of the Incarnation is the pouring-out of God's life for us. He doesn't cling to his dignity as God, because he wants to be the little wailing infant, still coming to terms with the journey down the birth-canal: the child so overwhelmed by the world, that he falls asleep five times while we murmur into his uncomprehending ears: the little child I saw in the supermarket last Thursday, whispered-to by his mother, and then whirled down the aisle past the potatoes in loud paroxysms of chuckling laughter, so that even the lady on the delicatessen smiled with a broad smile, and the little commercial place seemed lit up with the sort of loving mirth that money can't buy. What brilliant signs of God happen sometimes, capable of preaching parables to us! Let whoever who has ears, listen to what the Spirit says!

The Offering Of Our Body

We are privileged to offer our bodies in union with Jesus. We work for each other, we give small gifts of labour and love: sometimes we take on massive, soul-destroying jobs in order to pay for our families' security and happiness. But let's not lose the precious truth that we are *saved* not by these sterling efforts of our own, but by Jesus' pouring out of his life for us. He didn't do that in eternity, where he pours out his life for the love of the Father before time began. He did it on a day when he was born in a provisional labour-ward set up in a stable, and on a day when he chuckled helplessly before a laughing mum and a tickling dad, when he first looked out with troubled eyes on an occupied country, when he reached out to a leper, when he embraced a sinner, when he fed a crowd, when he assailed a priestly caste, when he let himself be taken and condemned and crucified, and said *Father, forgive them, they do not know.* In him, God is with us. That's why we no longer need an earthly future or an earthly reason to live; we have a future that is eternal: because God has become Man, and so we are safe.

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