

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

So Many Signs And Wonders

It's widely believed that the age of miracles is past, and I personally believe that the remark is well-made if it stops us looking for weird and "inexplicable" happenings (the awful nonsense of bleeding hosts and nodding statues that pass for religious experience amongst some people). There have always been superstitious people, and there always will be; they have exalted, and will always exalt coincidences and unlucky accidents into signs from the hand of God, and bring religion into disrepute for those who quite properly shiver at superstition.

Real Miracles

True miracles bear witness to the power of grace, and people's honest faith in it. There is always something rooted in reality about a true miracle. What stops you in your tracks is that the power of God has seized on real humanity, and exalted it to new heights. It isn't the amazement of people watching a good conjuror, or the creepy feeling that comes over you when you're being deceived. If people smell a rat and refuse to accept a so-called miracle, it might be because they have a good helping of common sense and a good grasp of humanity. That doesn't make them reprehensible or faithless: just sane! We must not, cannot, build sound faith on superstition, but we must expose it for what it is: at best silliness, at worst a pack of lies.

Meeting Christ

People still meet the risen Lord; not walking through Tesco's in a red toga, or glimmering faintly in the dark at the top of the stairs, but in the Sacraments, in the ministry of others, in the deep reception of the Scriptures, in the words of proclamation, in the flowing sacramental grace of a loving Christian relationship, and in the obedient acceptance of all that life throws at us and demands of us. The experience of "one who walks beside us" is not like being haunted. It's a sort of disclosure that tells us we are on the Way he trod, that the Spirit that led him is leading us, that we are helping to carry his Cross. It's quite real, and it can truly be called an encounter, and it really does lift us beyond the limitations of our human life and gifts, into a realm where things more than human can be done. When I see someone clinging to faith when all their feelings are screaming about despair and disaster, I know that I'm in

the presence of the miraculous, and I know that Jesus is there, and that this is his work. When I see someone insisting on forgiveness and fidelity, when any normal decent human being would have pulled the plug and walked away, I know that someone is walking on water. When I see someone insisting on pouring out his or her life for God and for others, when the world is offering them all the multi-coloured prizes in its gift, I am quite convinced that I am in the presence of the Jesus who was tested in the wilderness. The thing is, that I have seen all these and many more "signs and wonders" - super-human things, if you will, but rooted in the simplicity and honesty of everyday life, and all the more impressive because of it.

Thomas The Believer

Thomas was not with them when Jesus came on Easter night (this time last week); and he is still in the state he shared with the other apostles on Holy Saturday; broken, numb, and devastated, he had died, and was buried. They have experienced the coming of Christ, and they find it quite difficult to carry him with them. Thomas has a great pedigree. Do you remember when the others were trying to stop Jesus going to Lazarus, because the Jews were resolved to kill him, the voice of Thomas is heard: *Let us go too, and die with him.* Does that sound like an unbeliever? I don't believe it does. And he is there again in the Last Supper story: exasperated he cries out: *Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?* Jesus doesn't reply with reproach: *I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life!* Now, as he is offered the wounds of Jesus to explore (and we are not told that he did), we find him reaching a new height of faith. He calls Jesus *Lord* (so did they all): but he calls him *my Lord and my God* - which is what no-one else does in the New Testament: no, not even Paul. It is Thomas, therefore, who crowns the Christian Scripture with its highest title for Jesus. Let me not hear of "doubting Thomas" after that! I pray that we will all have the grace to see the deeds of God in the story of Easter, and set our faith in them above all other realities. Let us never think that we need sensational scenarios to bully us into submission. *The Word was made flesh, and lives among us; we see his glory.* The glory of God is human life lived to the full.
Fr Philip