

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

The Father And I Are One

The Greek actually says *One Reality*. This must surely rank as the most total claim Jesus makes for himself; and he does it when he is talking about being the Shepherd of the Human Race. We can therefore assume that Jesus is our Shepherd *because* he is One with the Father.

“Follow Me!”

That call which Jesus issued to Peter in last week's Gospel was made in full knowledge of the Way of the Cross. Now Jesus leads his sheep on the same way: his way, which is the path of life, and the *only* path to life. At the last Supper Thomas complained, *We don't know where you are going, so how can we know the Way?* Well, now we *do* know the way: the way of sacrificial love, that makes an Easter pathway through the tomb to the Father. I find this is essential to the making-sense of our faith. If Jesus' way didn't embrace death, it would just be another good idea for using up earthly life. I can think of several rather attractive ways to spend that, as long as funds and good health can be made to last: indeed, my next summer holiday is designed to give a small taste of what life could be like without a few tiresome facts like the need to work, suffer, and answer telephones, letters, emails, and doorbells! Jesus does not come simply to tell us how to live a *good* life. He tells us how to inherit *eternal* life; and therefore our map must guide us into, and beyond, the mystery of death before it's fit for purpose.

What Sort Of A Shepherd?

First of all, a good shepherd has to care for the sheep in their reality: taking them on as they are, knowing their habits, tendencies, and weaknesses, sensing their dangers and perils before they strike, and staying near them whatever happens. It's no good nursing a secret desire to turn them into racehorses or performing tigers or spaniels. Nor is it good to let them run their own lives while you do something beautiful elsewhere. The mark of a shepherd is that he is *there*, sniffing the air and listening to the airwaves where the sheep are. So the Church must be where people are, and not in an ivory tower or cloistered shrine where sheep can't go. We must watch over our contemporaries, warning them if they are straying into danger, offering them guidance to safe

pasture, sometimes being willing to fight off wolves and false shepherds who may raid them. This means we must be wise. Jesus says: *the sheep that are mine listen to my voice, I know them, and they follow me*. It's the job of every Christian to follow him, and start a fashion for following him which other sheep might catch onto.

The Shepherd Gives Eternal Life

Very often, the Gospel of Life doesn't quite ring true in the ears of sheep. It sounds more like a Gospel of Death. How easily we can get it wrong! That the truth of Christ makes sense of death is essential. But we are here to proclaim life, not death. If the Way we announce just feels like being closed-down, denied, and steamrolled to match some ghastly standard dreamed up by a human being, then something is profoundly wrong. The call of Jesus is *always* a call into life. If we tell it properly, it will echo in the hearts of those who hear it, and they will respond, because it resounds with Christ's call to life.

My Sheep Will Never Be Lost

Once you have sensed that the Good Shepherd makes even death shine with meaning and hope, nothing can threaten you any more, and you know you can't be lost. If Jesus made the Cross a path to life, he can make my worst experiences into milestones on the same road. *The Father who gave you to me is greater than anyone. No-one can steal from the Father*. So our belonging to Christ is permanent, and will always make our way bright with its eternal promise. *Never being lost* is a marvellous definition of Christian life. It shines brightly in a world where so many feel they're abandoned or meaningless.

One With The Father

Christ the Shepherd always shares the exact mind of the Creator. His plan for us is the same plan by which we were called into being. So in the end the Christian way will fulfil us in all our departments, in every nook and cranny of our nature. So our obedience to Jesus is our joy and exultation, our loving entry into life. We must be sure that we do not blunt our hunger and thirst for the enduring gifts of heaven. It would be sad to inherit eternity, and to live like paupers in that royal house.
Fr Philip