

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

How Do You Do?

On the threshold of the Easter Triduum - on Holy Thursday afternoon - there's always a strange feeling in the heart of a priest. He has probably been round the sick people of the parish - it may be, that he has combed the Hospital, if he's a chaplain - and the sick will have given him some of their pain, and some of their witness of faith, and he will have delivered them the sacraments of forgiveness and of healing. He will also have heard a great many confessions, perhaps some hours' worth; and he will have taken aboard all the sense of discouragement and failure, and tried to replace it with fresh hope and trust. He will now be contemplating a marathon of liturgy, with a helter-skelter succession of themes, a tsunami of Scripture, and music, drama, and sign-language that will take every ounce of attention and understanding to do properly. Suddenly the help in the Rectory will seem to disappear, and he is left at the mercy of the 'phone, where a long procession of people are waiting, to wonder politely whether he can *possibly* tell them the time of the service on Friday Morning, or Sunday Night, when there are no services at all.

Aix Les Pains

Meanwhile, this year, the Parish Priest is wondering how he is going to get through this Herculean business when his ravaged body seems full of pulled muscles and surgical scars; foot-washing and prostrations are suddenly a bit of a problem! But he is only one; the Church will be *filled* with arthritic joints, allergic reactions, chronic backaches and tinnitus. There will be undiagnosed symptoms awaiting recognition. There will be aching hearts and broken promises, disappointed hopes, lost loves, deep depressions. There will be people who are bereaved, with that numb feeling of disaster that comes with the condition. Furthermore, there will be divided minds, faltering faith, people whose religion seems to be in fragments. And there will be people almost overwhelmed by the feeling of guilt: awareness of sin will disable many from contemplating a feast like this one.

What Sort Of Feast Is It?

This, however, is where the fascination of Easter starts. What sort of feast is there that can unite people in such a variety of states? In my view, only this one has the remotest

chance of reaching the far places into which the human family has dispersed. Because the entry into this feast is reserved for those who have some inkling of the worst things you can imagine. Only those who have scented the power of death can come to this one. And if death has really gained a foothold in you, then you will have what you need to taste the joy of Easter. So the Parish Priest - and he is only one - knows where to start!

Beware Of False Gods

I shiver when I imagine the damage that's suffered because of bad religion - all the awful false gods that people are trying to worship: the mean, chiselling, vengeful, pettifogging little divinised Hitlers and Stalins that people are trying to placate. Religious education is vital, so that people can be liberated from these abominations. I'm afraid some people think that any faith is better than nothing. I'm sure that no faith would be better than the ghastly muddle of pathological phobias that some people end up with. Received wisdom amongst politicians is that religion is the most disposable subject in the school curriculum. Well, we shall reap the whirlwind - not in the form of the irreligious world some would like to see, but in the form of savage, untamed, subhuman religions which harness the might of religious obedience to hideous idolatries, whose cults will appal us.

The Fridge Magnet

I saw a hilarious fridge-magnet recently. It was a small black tablet, inscribed with the words: *Don't Make Me Come Down There, God Says*. I don't know what star dreamed that one up, but it makes you think. In the Jesus of Good Friday God has truly "come down here". From the feast we are celebrating there is no exclusion whatsoever for any human being. God has set our salvation in the lowest possible place, so that the humblest of us can reach it. At the climax of the Easter Vigil we shall read Luke's story of the empty tomb: eloquent most of all, for us beginners in the following of Christ. God shows us that the death we fear holds no power over his Beloved. And in that superb moment of demonstration, he claims power over all our un-lived lives, all our hesitating humanity. Let us celebrate the feast, then, in the Lord: a joyous Passover to life. *Fr Philip*