

## THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

### They Rested As The Law Required

For a priest, today is the hardest day of the year (six Gospels at Mass, three of them the Passion!) so think of this before you ask Fr to come and help you dig over the rockery.

#### The Great Week

But today is just the beginning of a week that will exhaust us all, emotionally as well as physically. And our eyes are fixed on the last day of the week: Holy Saturday, when Christ lies in the tomb and the churches wait in silence. This is the last Sabbath rest properly so called that we have; Christians rest (allegedly) on Sundays, so we should call it a "dominical" rest rather than a sabbatical. But on Holy Saturday we join our Jewish brethren, and the Church enters a numb, empty day when the power of the grave seems to take us over.

#### The Sacred Triduum

Nothing in the world can be more important than the mysteries of the Three Days: Thursday, Friday, and Saturday of this week. That's why we should cancel everything that interferes with our following of the Lord in the liturgy. We await the Evening Mass of the Supper of the Lord, with its amazing intimacy and its cross-currents of irony: Judas at the table, the disciples' talk of swords, the questions and fears which interweave the themes of Passover: liberation, revolution, the Exodus from slavery. Over all of these themes, the theme of obedient service, alive in the heart of Christ, as he washes their feet, and most mysteriously offers them his body and blood.

We follow him into the garden and his arrest, the hurried trial in the darkness, the bullying in the barracks, and at last we see him on Friday, brought forth into the place of judgment by Pilate, in the name of the whole world; we hear ourselves pronouncing his fate, and we know that he is our brother in it, because we are also sentenced to death, in our case justly, for our sins. This year, in Luke, we shall hear today the story of the brigand crucified with him, who is the last to speak with him on earth. We shall hear him give salvation to a sinner who asks for it.

#### And So To The Sabbath

With his death, we enter in the sinking light of Friday into a Sabbath rest like no other. Here is no cause for joy, no beautiful

ceremony over the starched cloth, no lighting of the lamps and blessing of the wine-cups; the Church will have no Eucharist today. It's as if we join Jesus in a kind of entombment. But not in *his* tomb, which is closed with a great stone, and sealed against us. We are in a tomb of mourning for him, consecrated as a day on which no work can be done; even if any deed could comfort us, it would be forbidden by the Law. There is a specific character to this Saturday, and few of us will have the power to cultivate it, because we will be anxiously making last visits to shop and supermarket, making beds for visitors, or ourselves arriving in holiday destinations, *busy about so many things, when few are needed, indeed, only one*. Like Mary of Bethany, we require not only inner wisdom but a brass neck against Martha, if we are to choose the better part.

#### One Gift For God And His Church

The one great gift we can all give to God is to move all obstacles, and to be present at the Easter Vigil. If this glorious ceremony has our full support, then the Easter miracle can *and will* take place. If the Holy Thursday Mass has moved us with the love of Christ, if the Good Friday memorial of his Passion has bonded us to his death, we could never fail to seek that amazing running journey to the tomb, to find the great proclamation of its emptiness, and the folded grave-cloths discarded by the eternally living Lord. By this time, our service of Christ, our obedience to God the Father, will appear for what it is: an obedience to our own deepest need. Because our greatest purpose is to find the key to the tomb, to discover the bread which we may eat, and not die. When we have met God in the depth of our own tomb, and heard his eternal call for his children to live, our quest will have come home, and the bearings of our different lives will all be set on the great course that will unite the Church and the World, bringing a Paschal peace deeper than all the powers of division. It is not for ourselves only that we follow Christ in this week. It is for all those we love, living, and most especially, dead: their presence will be gathered around the Church in the holy light of the Great Vigil, listening with us to the hope that will reunite us, the promise of God, the new and everlasting covenant. May our community be worthy of the feast. *Fr Philip*