

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Our True Home Is In Heaven

I think this is a very consoling line from the Bible. But I can understand how it isn't everyone's favourite. Living in St Hugh's Rectory, especially during three months of road-works, and the related road-rage, outside, makes it easy to feel that I'd like to have a true home somewhere else. If I had a lovely wife, and a crowd of children, and a mortgage, and a nice garden, and a spotted dog, and all sorts of hopes and dreams for the earthly lives of people I loved, I probably wouldn't see the poetry in this line of Scripture quite so clearly.

Nevertheless, We Are Reminded

The solid-looking things we set in place around us keep reminding us that there's no security for us in this life. Having reached the stage where the rectory heating-system wouldn't switch off, even in the hottest weather, and needed to be replaced, we took the decision to renew it last month. The result is very smart and works - or doesn't work - when we tell it to. But of course it will not last long, and built-in obsolescence will remind us once again that everything passes. The sick people whose bodies are breaking down, or the ones who are in mourning for the beloved dead, are not accidental characters who have had unusual bad luck. They're people who have come to know the truth. What they need above all else is the realisation embodied by the line at the top of the page. We're not homeless. It's just that our home isn't here.

Being Pilgrims

Once that knowledge is in place, things begin to happen. We stop looking for permanence and security in anything that passes, and we go straight to the top: we begin to make friends with the Kingdom of Heaven, and little by little we entrust our whole life to God, leaning on him whose hold on us never lets us fall. The *bread of travellers* means more and more to us as we receive it at every Mass; we begin to see how our life is a journey, constantly full of departures, of folding-up the tent, of getting ourselves into motion every day. And what about the goal of our travelling? *We don't know where you are going*, said Thomas, *so how can we know the way?* When I'm on holiday I entrust the map to my trusted fellow-traveller, and do as he tells me (most of the time). Sometimes he

gives me a choice, but as I get older I find myself replying: *Just tell me where to go, and I'll do it.* It's because I trust the man with the map. But how much more the one who says *I am the way, the truth, and the life*, and who assures me that I can be guided to my Father through him! I know that God has a path for me, and that I must try to travel along it with grace and trust.

Leaving Home

It saddens me that so many of our youngsters decide that if they will go to higher education, it will be in Lincoln, staying at home with their families. When I went off to University each term, in an England with only one motorway, it would be to stay in Exeter for ten weeks. There was no popping home to get one's washing done or to be fed properly for a weekend! I used to feel strange as I left. I was going off to an exciting life of learning and (frankly) fun with my friends; and my sisters were setting off to dull school, and my parents to dull work, and I felt a sadness in leaving them to it. At the same time I knew then, and much more know now, that my leaving was an act of deep significance. I knew it was time to see what my home had given me, and to decide what I would carry with me, and what I might leave behind. It was a great privilege for me, as a University Chaplain years later, to be allowed to help students in their first years away from home, to make the same decisions and choices. I knew I had to help them to be pilgrims, looking ahead to the house, the city, built by God.

Elisha's Oxen

These poor animals are doing a fair day's work one minute; the next moment they have become a sacrifice, and then dinner. Their sudden transformation becomes symbolic of their master's leaving home. In the same way Luke gave us Peter's sinking boat and tearing nets as the moment when he becomes "fisher of men". Do you think you can identify in your own life a moment when you seized the reins, and wrenched your life around, from following the course set for you by others, to find the way God wants for you? This should be a reality we can all point to: the moment we learnt that belonging to the Kingdom means having no stake in the world, being free to travel.

Fr Philip