

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Our Communion In Christ

The Gospel today sparks some very worrying thoughts about our salvation. It's always been a terrible image to me, this story of our arrival at the wedding-feast in the Kingdom, only to be told *I do not know where you come from! Be off!*

Where Did We Go Wrong?

If this story is in direct quotation from Jesus, he seems to be aiming it at his Jewish listeners. St Luke thinks of the *nation* Israel as formally excluded from the Church: in the *Acts of the Apostles* he makes it clear that the Jews as a *nation* have forfeited the right to be called the Chosen People; *that* reality is now embodied in the Church - the "New Israel" - which each and every Jew is heartily encouraged to join. But we can't evade this uncomfortable saying of Jesus by deciding we aren't addressed by it. If Jews could lose the plot comprehensively, so too can Christians. Where the Church's agenda veers away from the agenda of Jesus Christ, it is capable of dangerous and damaging actions which can hold back the day of salvation, and bring the Gospel into disrepute. The Church is nearly 2,000 years old; it isn't difficult to find examples of quite appalling behaviour carried out in the name of Christ. If it were not so, we wouldn't find the words of today's Gospel so frightening.

The Work Of The Holy Spirit

It is the Holy Spirit who keeps the Church close to Christ, in communion with him. We need to seek the Spirit's guidance constantly, so that we can readily test our impulses against the register of the Spirit. Jesus said, *I will send you another Advocate, who will never leave you. He will guide you into the fulness of truth.* We can access this communion by humble and faithful prayer, at any time, putting ourselves in the presence of God. The Holy Spirit reminds us to do this, prompting us to get off our high horse, stop in our tracks, reconsider what is driving us in any particular direction, and saving us in our worse moments. Once we have done this, it becomes easier to recognise our danger, and feed our considerations with healthier ideas and more salubrious motives. Prayer is not the same thing as self-centred consideration. It's obedient, open-minded, and dominated by the greatness of God. When we pray, our whole being is laid open to God; whatever is

unworthy in us can't survive this exposure. We can't preserve hatred, anger or vindictiveness if we are in God's presence. Lust can't keep hold of us if we are really in prayer. Deception - even self-deception - can't survive the gaze of God. You would have to flourish these unwholesome motives in the face of God; it's inconceivable that you could keep hold of them and still pray.

This Holy Communion

We have a sacramental promise from Jesus which is embodied in the Eucharist. When you remember the conditions for the valid celebration of the Eucharist, you can see how they build against the fear in this worrying Gospel (*I don't know where you come from!*). Firstly, there has to be present a congregation of faithful Christians. The community is a great safeguard against false religion; people know us, and they can be counted on to tell us if they find fault in us. We mustn't mistake our Church as a merely earthly community: it's a communion with Christ, and of it St Luke says the same awesome words that Jesus says to Peter: *what you bind and loose on earth will be bound and loosed in heaven.* So let's look at our relationship with fellow-Christians in a new light! Secondly, the Mass requires that the Scripture be read in the Church. When this happens God speaks (which is why your priest sings even the psalm and the Gospel acclamation). God is speaking when these words are spoken to us; on this day, in this place, the message of God is addressed to us in a privileged way. I take daily Mass very seriously for this reason: God has something special to say - to me; to us; today. Finally, we must make the communion real, sharing our love and concern with those who are here - thus, the sign of peace - and with all who are dear to us - thus the prayer of the faithful, and the sending out of the ministers with Holy Communion, to the sick and housebound: and thus the frequent collections for those who need our help.

Sunday By Sunday

If we are faithful to the life of the Church, we may hope that the Lord will recognise us when judgment day comes. The Church is charged with the gathering and shepherding of the flock of whom Jesus says: *I know my own, and my own know me.* Fr Philip