

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

## Do Not Seek The Place Of Honour

This is one of the most delicate places in the Gospel of Luke, who is pretty delicate in his writing. It is certain that “honour” is a hot potato in every age, not least in ours. There’s quite a spat going on in our country about an alleged “sale of honours”, whereby rich people can buy themselves titles and gongs of various sorts by making cash donations. The row in our country is only worried about people who pay into political parties; I’d have thought precisely the same questions arise about people who donate money to hospices or playgroups. Buying honour is the same throughout all its variations; it discredits the givers of honour - in this case, the Crown - but also all who accept honours, and the honours themselves.

### What Is Honour?

I’d have thought honour in its origin is something spontaneous and genuine: the awe, love and respect which people give to someone who has proved worthy of trust. It isn’t currency, to be sold or traded. If it becomes so, it is valueless, not worth buying. There’s a great argument for saying that if it’s real, it doesn’t need a medal or a title; and if it isn’t real, it doesn’t deserve one. A famous theologian said of two Popes who were proposed for canonisation at the same time, *The first shouldn’t be canonised: and the second doesn’t need to be canonised!* In our family lives we know well that a good father or mother will always be given the honour they deserve; a parent who has failed the children can thump the table endlessly, but in vain: because honour springs from human hearts; like love itself, it can’t be gained except as a free gift from others.

### Looking After Your Honour

It follows that no plotting or deviousness of ours can safeguard our honour. It’s one of those precious things which comes, or does not come, without any control of ours. If we are worthy of honour, it will come to us. If not, no plan of ours can engineer it. So we must look further back; and Jesus gives us two immediate steps backwards, which will set us on our way: first, *do not seek the place of honour*. Second, *invite the poor, the blind, the halt and the lame*. Here are two strategic agendas which will ensure that we shall be at least honourable. Whether we are in fact honoured is beside the point. Jesus died

dishonoured and dishonourable in human terms. We can’t ask to be enshrined in marble and still be his followers! The ultimate honour is the Resurrection; and that is what I hope for. The rest doesn’t matter for long!

### Do Not Take The Place Of Honour

I have a very poor idea of ambition. I know some people can harbour it, and apparently keep their simplicity of heart and their generosity as it should be. Let’s not judge them! I think anyone who aspires to public office is very brave, because they will have eggs thrown at them all their life. Some of them are surely very noble and decent. But I love the people I know who avoid limelight and do their best. They ask no public recognition or consideration; what they do has its effect in real terms, and they ask no more than that. We have all known people like this. Let us honour them in our hearts, and so live in the Kingdom of God, where the real rewards belong.

### When You Give A Party, Ask The Poor

This obviously isn’t about dinner-parties. It’s about the whole of our lives. We have lots to share in this country: with whom do we choose to share it? Do we arrange plenty of good times with our beloved family and friends, and steer clear of the unloved and unlovable? I guess most of us keep what we call our spare time for congenial company, and perhaps arrange some rather utilitarian contact with “the less fortunate”. One of the things I learned as a young teenager was in visiting a local Cheshire Home, where dying people were offered hospice care. I noticed straight away the small spaces they could call their own, often having to share a room with one or two others; but most eloquently, the little collection of personal possessions they had; a picture, perhaps of a dead relative who had been their last carer; a tin of talc, a bar of chocolate, a small vase of flowers, and that was all. I think the faces of the people I met there will stay with me all my life. They were beyond this world and its honours, and they were pleased to see me and to chat with me. I felt privileged beyond words, and at the same time helpless. I wanted to bless them somehow, and didn’t know what I could do. I know now that I can try to live a life worthy of their presence, their need. *Fr Philip*