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# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

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## A Walk On The Dark Side

I've been having a tough time lately, what with surgery and painful recovery, and various horrid bugs and afflictions hitting me when I was down. **It** brings back to me two very important things which I would like to share with you. One is about how we feel, and the other is about making our mind up.

### How Do You Feel?

One of the things you're often asked in hospital or as you gaze up from the pillows at home. Very important too; by your feelings we can come to understand what's going on inside the body. But it isn't the total picture. The nervous system is marvellous, but it tells lies too. Often healing can be more painful than deterioration, and what we least *want* to do may be what we most *ought* to. So the maddening truth that your healers have never even begun to suffer your kind of pain can work for you. They can tell you to stand straight when your feelings want you to curl up, to walk when you are screaming to be still, and the rest. So we get used to the idea of denying our feelings their way. Loud and authoritative as they may be, we can say no and contradict them, with no loss of humanity whatsoever, and with great gain to our eventual health.

### How We Are Living

This is not the way most people govern their lives, however. For our culture, what people feel is becoming paramount. Our novels are long descriptions of feelings, our religion a roseate visit to the realms of emotion. We are quite happy to run our lives around artificial feeling: people work a whole week so as to go to the pub and get wasted at the weekend, or to enjoy a bit of "retail therapy" to make them feel rich. The depth and dimension of feeling is the whole of life for us, our register of good or evil. A televised dimension to life offers to add what's missing from the reality: we find ourselves caught up in drama, romantically enthralled, fantasising about new decor, new houses, new lives in foreign parts. We contemplate the thunderous transformation we think might come to us in a lottery-win. Then comes the moment of turn-off, the retreat into truthful things, with a grimace and a vague feeling of bad luck. **If** this is anything like the truth, we need help!

### How Do You Believe?

A much more positive question is about the placing of our faith. Faith isn't based on feeling at all, indeed it is far nearer that place where we contradict our feelings and reassert a deeper self that isn't a slave to hormones or pheromones or the angle of the sun's rays. We should remind ourselves that living by our emotions is little different from the life of a stray dog that does what comes naturally. There is great self-assurance about this kind of life. But there's very little that deserves to be called human. For instance, even the generous and sympathetic things we do in that frame of mind have to be done because they give us some kind of pay-off – make us feel better; and little by little you recognise that you've reordered the world with yourself at the heart and summit of it; a sad, lonely world for anyone to live in, however they're feeling!

### Blessedness

Jewish and Christian religion says that happiness is not something some of us have, and some haven't (like thick hair or blue eyes), but a *gift* that all can seek. So Scripture has this lovely word *blessedness* – the experience of having been blessed. It isn't a possession, but a relationship. You need to relate to the one who will bless you. Our faith speaks with one voice about this. The One who will bless you is the One who creates you. This implies from the start that everyone created can hope to be blessed. And you can't conclude, from the way you feel, that you're blessed or not. *Happy you who are poor...hungry...weeping; alas for you rich.. full-fed..laughing!* Now here is some very good news indeed, especially for a person filled with pain. All may not be as you feel. Think again!

### Those We Cannot Help

One of the most extreme forms of evil is that which comes to us in the lives of those we love, and cannot help. Truly God asks an extreme form of faith when this happens. Our prayers must be our refuge in this storm, knowing that where evil is at its height, we are where Christ himself hung in torment, but kept his faith. May his faithful presence support us all in this darkness. *Fr Philip*