

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

I Have Finished The Work

What a great thing to be able to say! I wonder how any of us *can* say it with real truthfulness, and at what sort of juncture. They say, for instance, that “women’s work is never done” - a sexist remark, but there’s truth in it. Work is endemic to humanity living in time; as soon as a meal is on the table, there is washing-up to be done, and if you sit and chat for half-an-hour afterwards a child will appear and ask for something to eat (returning ten minutes later with chocolate everywhere); the experience of *having finished* is actually rare; more usual is the feeling of *being* finished! A priest, to be personal, is similarly afflicted: a few jobs, however well done, do not count for much against the priest’s evening reflection on the great unchurched, the unevangelized, the huge need for God that is everywhere. We can all feel overwhelmed by the endless demands of our lives, because we live like treadmill-dwellers, worrying till we drop.

I am coming to you

I’m sure the nearness of Jesus to his death is important here. Jesus’ death didn’t leap out of the wings and snuff him out. He went to it in a very special way, *laying down his life for his friends*. What he says means, “My life is nearly finished, and my death is prepared for.” All the teaching and healing of his busy life is beginning to recede into its place in history. What matters is the death by which he will *go to the Father*. All his work has been the setting of the scene for this journey, in which the Son of God will give glory to his Father, and the Father will glorify the Son. This is the purpose of the whole human story, and Jesus feels his central place in it: John says: *he knew that the Father had put everything into his hands, and that he had come from God and was returning to God*. This journey now completely fills his horizon: there is nowhere else for him to go, nothing else left for him to do. His path is clear, and he can truly say: “I have finished.”

They are in the world

But he is not absconding, deserting, bailing-out. The journey to the Father is not a way of abandoning ship. *His departure is his greatest act of service to us, his closest sharing in what we fear*. We most fear death; our true

Shepherd chooses to die with us, to make our death part of the divine path he opens for us. His coming to our side was not accomplished until he had died like us. And this is not obscured by the fact that his death was decreed by human tribunals and processes. Despite our legislating his death, he is still in charge, and his freedom in laying down his life makes his death a fully human act. You can’t ask anything more of a human being, when he has obediently gone to his death; that is why Jesus can say: *I have finished the work*. Now his human life has been lived, he is *with us* forever, not just born for us, and living for us, but dying for us, a whole life fulfilled in a final, total, free gift of self.

Time for Glory

The sense of completion is expressed in the request for *glorification*. Jesus is shown in the first three Gospels, transfigured with the blinding light of heaven at the top of a mountain. In the Fourth Gospel he calls for the glory of God to invest him on the vigil of his sacrifice - which he will offer on a mountain - and it is in the moment of his death that we glimpse his transition into the glory of God: *after he had taken the wine, he said: “It is accomplished!” and bowing his head, he gave up his spirit*. This is a very significant phrase. Perhaps if we could live closer to the Cross, we might share better the hope of glory for which the Church now prays: “Come, Holy Spirit: fill the hearts of your faithful!”
Fr Philip