

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Humility and Humiliation

There's quite a tension between those two words. The first is a virtue, and the second is usually thought of as an offence committed by one person against another.

Down to Earth

The Latin word *humus* means *earth*, as gardeners might tell you; the virtue of humility is having your feet on the ground. I suppose humiliation must mean *being brought down to earth*; and we ought to acknowledge that, although this may sometimes give a sickening jolt to the spine, it is still a good thing to happen. Earth is where we belong, and it is where you meet a better class of person - humane, honest, unpretentious. Because we *are* earth, it is also where we meet our real selves. Earth is better to stand on than teetering ladders we may sometimes want to climb, and it gives more scope for movement than a pedestal.

“Going Down!”

Disturbing words from the local Magistrate, the captain of the Titanic, the Chairman of Bolton Wanderers, or your Stockbroker. But from the lift operator in the Towering Inferno, the nurse taking your temperature in the Isolation Hospital, or the Captain of Noah's Ark, quite the reverse. It has always struck me that if we meet Jesus of Nazareth in our searching to go *upwards*; he meets us *on his way downwards*. One way to look at humility is to see in this encounter a real invitation to change our direction, to go down with him, with him to meet others.

Here Is Your King

The image of Jesus crowned and robed and enthroned on the seat of judgment is offered to us by Pontius Pilate, who is about to hand him over to be crucified. This magnificent irony is full of truth for us; maybe we, like the Jews, think *we have no king except Caesar*; Pilate speaks no less than the truth when he says: *But this is your King*.

Blessed Are You Who Are Poor

The Gospel today promises a kingdom, and the royalty are surprising to us: the poor. Is

not the very same point being hammered home to us? The only real kingship is to be sought in the mysterious poverty of the holy. The power that gushes with oil and bristles with gun-barrels and rides over the bodies of the poor is not kingship, but a doomed, sick perversion of it. We must learn to look at the dispossessed in the camps and prisons and slums of the world and say: *Here is your King....* just as Jesus, in his last moment, looked on the dying crook at his side and said: *Today, I promise you, you will be with me in Paradise!* In the economy of God, that is the way it will finally be.

However, Until That Time Comes...

...we will no doubt continue to pay our respects to the cruelties and insanities of a world that loves the proud, and seeks so wholeheartedly for power to oppress, to defeat, and to triumph; the great gods of success, wealth, and personal fulfilment will still inspire us to worship with our lives. I wonder if the compassion of Christ will read, in our form of poverty, that which qualifies us to inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. If not, then perhaps we have some salutary humiliation to seek, and if it comes our way (as often it only will) at the hands of others, we should cease to lick our wounds in self-pity, and think that we might have been given a blessing we had not learned how to seek on our own behalf.

Fr Philip