

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Tormented by Thirst

There is a world that thirsts for God. Yes, it exists! Look at the frantic searching in our brilliant society: the urge to find something beyond science, technology, and comfort: the interest in cults, sects, and mysteries, the dabbling in drugs, the occult, anything that offers to expand the mind. We have lost hope in many of the purposes we used to live for; we know there's more to life, and we are prepared to take risks to discover what it is. Some of us feel that people are trying to re-invent the wheel, but be patient, and try to think of new ways of presenting our faith, and the Lord of our faith: and do not turn your back on these seekers after truth.

Sick To The Heart

Water lies low, and those who search for it must go downhill with their pitcher; then they will fill it with water, and there will be a long, weary climb back to the house. Hid in that brief sequence is the killing routine of daily life, washing and replacing and fetching and carrying, resting and rising, in order to keep at a distance the even more dangerous realities - homelessness, hunger, thirst, loneliness - all of which whisper to us of vulnerability, weakness, and death. In what frame of mind do people stand at the well-head? It is a brief gap in a toiling life, a fleeting experience of rest amid labour. But the well opens up a dream (of which our pipes and drains have robbed us): the poetry of water, the magic of this element that is almost life itself in the desert. Here is something that cannot be read by the scientific eye alone: water as *miracle*. John gives us a paradox: he shows us Jesus "in possession" of the well, as the Samaritan woman arrives on her errand for water; yet it is he who asks her for a drink.

A God Who Thirsts for the World

Everything Jesus did served the world. As he hung on the Cross, he said: "I thirst." Now it is this foreigner that he asks to give him a drink; and suddenly he and she are united at the well-head, he and she athirst together for the water of Jacob's well. But he is going to "educate" her thirst. He begins to speak the language of faith: *if you knew what God was offering...it would be you who would ask,*

and he would give you living water...." Our world needs to turn from its restless and sometimes greedy search, and its frozen prosaic literal language, and grasp the way in which God expands our desire. We think we are filled with thirst: we want to slake it, *but God wants to deepen it.*

Read The Preface!

"When he asked the woman of Samaria for water to drink, Christ had already prepared for her the gift of faith. *In his thirst to receive her faith, he awakened in her heart the fire of your love.*" The amazing intimacy of these words in today's Preface shows us the depth behind the Gospel story. In his thirst Jesus is the one who will hang on the Cross for this woman and her six serial men-friends. He will give her the water which she can only dream about, which will spring up in her to everlasting life. *He knows her intimately*, but he is undismayed by her half-pagan history, and her garbled changing of the subject to evade his disturbing understanding of her. At last she expresses her faith in the coming Messiah, and Jesus tells her, in divine tones, "I AM HE": and another lost person is gathered into the friendship of God. Then she sets off, looking for the townsfolk amongst whom she lives, and becomes not only a believer but an evangelist.

The Sacraments

If you let it, this story can present you with so many of the features of Lent and Easter. Here is the water of Baptism, springing to eternal life. Here is Confession, and the offer of reconciliation: and here is the true worship, in spirit and truth, which springs from faith in the Easter Gospel. We can see how deeply John's Gospel is impregnated with the sacramental truths which lie deeper than the toiling, noisy world. We must still the noise, and descend to seek the water of life, which cleanses, and springs eternally. There is a sublime compendium of Lenten themes to feed us as we fast. These two meet at a well; they meet in the mystery of thirst, that is, in the throes of the most basic bodily desire, whose call we must answer regularly throughout each day. It is in our desire that we shall make our act of faith. *Fr Philip*