

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

With Me

“We have left all things to follow you,” said Peter. “What are we to have, then?” Jesus replied: “You will eat and drink *with me* in the Kingdom!” Jesus is promising him a place of fulfilment in the new world that is coming. On Palm Sunday Peter might have thought his ship was coming in, as Jerusalem, David’s city, greeted the Son of David with flags and flowers.

“You can have no heritage *with me*...

...unless I wash you.” This too is Jesus to Peter, at the Last Supper; and the meaning of what is happening is quite impenetrable for Peter. “You will understand later,” Jesus promises: and he will: after the Cross has taught him its overwhelming lesson

“Someone who eats bread *with me*...

...will betray me.” The Last Supper has this bitter undercurrent of treachery, and if the Last Supper, then also the Eucharist. Here the holiness of God truly engages our sin, the sin of humanity; the Holy One of God sits down to eat with sinners. He is *with us*.

“Could you not watch *with me*?”

Jesus needed Peter, James and John to be close to him in his struggle to keep the Father’s will in his heart. He knew not only the distance between himself and his enemies, but his distance from his closest companions too. In the last hours of freedom, he washed their feet, and they did not understand. Now he is facing his own deepest need, and they do not understand that either. They are not *with him*, and they sleep.

“Today you will be *with me*...

...in Paradise.” Jesus to his fellow-convict in the final conversation of his life; only here is Jesus able to speak of *today*; for the poor crook is really *with him*, quite definitely on the same road; they are together. The word *Paradise* isn’t Jewish, but exotically Persian. It means the secret garden of a prince. It is a surprising place for a dying convict to inherit; but even more surprising for another one to bequeath.

“They have taken him away...

...and I do not know where they have laid him.” For Mary of Magdala it is the last disaster; she has come to weep at the tomb, and it lies desecrated. Mary is once more in the garden - that is Gethsemane, the Holy Sepulchre, and Eden; the place of all woes, falls, and losses is about to be revealed in the light of an eternal dawn. Her sense of his *absence* is unbearable, her heart seems finally to break at this unthinkable final blow. But *the Lord is close to the broken-hearted*, closer than she thinks; and when he speaks her name, *she knows him*.

“You too were *with Jesus the Galilean!*”

A glorious accolade for us; but for Peter the accusation that elicits his first denial. Perhaps he was not lying when he said: “*I do not know the man*”; indeed he showed very little closeness or understanding through the Passion. *But let that not be said of us this Holy Week*. Our faith gives us this inestimable gift, that we can in truth *be with him* in the mystery of his Passion and death. We can greet him as he enters the city to begin his Passover. Let us accept his humble washing of our feet, and share his last breaking of the bread and his pouring out of the cup of the new covenant. Let us stay awake with him in the garden, and follow him to his trial, and the carrying of his Cross, and the final accomplishment of all that he came to do: so that we can greet him as Mary did, and hear what the disciples heard: “*See, I am with you all days, even to the end of the world!*”

Fr Philip