

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

---

## Promise

What does it mean to live in the Promised Land? For us, I suspect, it means a rather strange mind-set based on the split notion that we are the heirs of the Kingdom of God, but we are living disinherited in a world that does not acknowledge God, and therefore does not acknowledge us. So *the land* may look pretty thin, and *the promise* is at a premium. We have to invent a style of living which will enable us to embody hope, in terms of generosity, bravery, and expectancy, in a world which speaks to us of our irrelevance, poverty, and insignificance. This is what Jesus said it would be like - we shouldn't be surprised!

### Life in the University

In the University the Chaplains are regarded by a lot of important people as oddities. We have our offices in the heart of the Campus, but we are not on the payroll. We are a voluntary presence, and owe our appointment to our Churches with the friendly acceptance of the University authorities. We ourselves have no authority at all except whatever charisma we may have as individuals, and the fact that we represent the Christian tradition. If we are good Christians, we will be respected as such. If we decided to become second-rate politicians, stirrers, or whatever, we would probably find our standing called into question fairly rapidly. That isn't our business. We are there to be good friends to the University, and we do our best to be good friends to the students and the hard-pressed staff in whatever way we can. We spend our time encouraging, enlightening, comforting, inspiring, befriending, introducing, fixing, and helping to build up or sometimes repair the lives of the people who are there. In this way we hope to represent the God who made them all, and the Lord of their salvation, in ways they can appreciate. But of course we are representing a person who is unacknowledged by many of the people we're there to help; so that we ourselves have to be the main sign of the realities we are there to represent. Everyone believes in us. It's the God we are there to serve they have problems with.

### Carrying a Promise

The Promised Land where we live is therefore just a tad notional. For us it's realer than the unpromised land where all the frightened people worry about their fragile security, the future of their jobs, the vagaries of their exams, the goodwill of their girlfriends, and so on. That is so frequently a desert with no sense of promise at all. We don't belong there. We have to be people who visibly have great expectations. We have to be hopeful to the ultimate degree, ready to communicate possibility, potential, space, freedom, confidence in the future. The important thing is that we must not tell any lies in the process. If what we bear witness to isn't true, we become part of the desert, with nothing safe to offer.

### Turn These Stones Into Bread

The first temptation of Jesus is to make the desert itself into a place of dwelling, to find himself food from the barren rocks in which he is being tested. He will not do it, because he is only in the desert as a traveller. Losing his sense of pilgrimage will be losing the Promise, losing hope. It is painful to keep hope alive in the empty cauldron of the desert. Will there really be a path to life, will I really reach the milk and honey which now looks like an impossible and silly dream? Isn't hope itself a sad delusion, that robs you of what you *can* have by dangling before you what you never will? It is a subtle test. Jesus is fasting, and this is so that he can live on the word of God - that is, on the Promise - instead of seeking to live *by bread alone*. He lays aside the earthly bread, so that the Promise can appear alone. That is a very precious tension. We must accept it ourselves, for the world's sake. *Fr Philip*