

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Consider Yourself Sent

I find the power to feel compassion *for a crowd* unusual. People feel *threatened* - indeed, there is a disability (agoraphobia) that afflicts huge numbers of people with physical panic - at the very thought of entering a crowd. I don't know the physical workings of it; but I'm convinced that such people are receiving in their bodies a sickness of the mind that is *more than personal*. The idea that the community we live in is evil or threatening surely betokens a *communal* disease rather than a personal one. Society itself is sick, and does not know how to heal itself; and the darker words of the prophets come to mind: *To what can I compare you, daughter of Jerusalem? Who can rescue or comfort you, young daughter of Zion? For huge as the sea is your affliction: who could heal you?* We long to hear a voice ring with the wisdom and compassion of a true physician: a sound diagnosis, and some prescription that will heal the sore. Instead, we hear too clearly the voices of charlatans whose appeal is to self-interest, whose methods are compromised with greed and untruth: as if the only voices we deserve to hear are the ones that offer us cheap solutions and a reduced humanity.

The Good Old Days (?)

We think we can remember a time when things seemed less bad. But the good old Victorian days were a lot more securely locked up and battened down than ours. There were no department-stores for the thieves to trolley-dash in; heavy oak doors, huge bolts and bars, heavy safes, big fierce dogs, spiked railings, and all sorts of strong-arm men were in the background of any Victorian street; and they weren't there because of the unquestioned decency of the citizens. Dickens' *Barnaby Rudge* describes a "demo" in London which had the shopkeepers boarding up their windows - a precaution they seem quite accustomed to adopting. By comparison, our world seems far more open to criminality; it's hardly surprising that we have more crooks.

Whom Shall I Send?

To dream of some messianic politician or prophetic leader who will call our country

back to community and compassion may be less than realistic. But that doesn't mean that the future is hopeless. Might *we* be the ones who can break the vicious circle? Could we shoulder the tasks of generosity and compassion?

Twelve Just Men

The Gospel today talks of Jesus sending out the Twelve, with no weapons except that mysterious "authority" that he himself displayed wherever evil was in charge: *authority over unclean spirits, with power to cast them out and to cure all kinds of diseases and sickness*. Notice that they are sent into the arena of Israel, in which all of Jesus' earthly ministry is set. This ministry can only end in the Cross, when the weight of the world's sins will crush the human life of its Saviour. How shall we write a prospectus, the job-description for an Apostle? "Voluntary workers wanted for small enterprise in Middle Eastern occupied country, working amongst outcasts, incurables, the deranged, and the dead. No ties or relationships allowed outside the Firm. Complete obedience to corporate ethic a must. Opportunities for uninsured international travel, guaranteed opposition from all in authority. No salary, but sticky end almost certain." Any takers?

Where Are Your Servants, Lord?

The odd thing is, *yes, there are!* To share with Jesus the privilege of breaking the chains of evil still inspires trust and obedience in people. Of all the experiences of my life as a priest, the discovery of that generosity in young people has been the most moving. It's lovely to see people marrying, and pouring out their lives in parenthood; they are always stunned by the sheer joy of having your life detonated by a baby. But I think the path of the apostle is still the most radical gift we can make of our lives. The wisdom of God tells us that self-giving is the path out of death and into eternal life. It's an exciting prospect, looking the most disturbing facts about our world squarely between the eyes. We echo the prophet's prayer: "Here we are, Lord; send us" as workers to your harvest! *Fr Philip*