

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

A Humble King?

What on earth is a humble king? In effect, a contradiction in terms, we may feel. Two centuries ago the French brought their out-of-touch royalty down to earth by removing their heads. Within a short space of time they were being ruled by a megalomaniac Emperor called Napoleon, who was not, in the end, so very good for them. Eventually - and it took a long time - they decided that they would do better without crowned heads, and have none to this day. If the French believe in the possibility of humble kings, they perhaps can't see the point of them.

The British Monarch

is expected to walk around with quiet authority, with that effortless dignity born of being quite sure that you are exactly what, who, and where you ought to be (I wonder how it's achieved!). One of the things the Monarch has to remember is that being the Monarch means almost nothing about political power. How one is meant to mediate *majesty* in that condition is something each (unfortunate) royal person has to work out on a personal basis.

All You Who Labour

When I read today's Gospel it always surprises me. *"Come to me, all you who labour, and are overburdened, and I will give you rest! Shoulder my yoke, and learn from me, gentle and humble in heart!"* It sounds inviting enough: *"My yoke is easy, and my burden light."* Well. And what is this burden? This is where the plot thickens. How about the throngs of the sick and disabled that won't let him have a day off or time to eat? What about the twelve dumb disciples who are so slow to get the message, and the crowds that are indifferent or hostile or violent? How about that scene where he weeps for the whole city of Jerusalem? Oh, and then there's the Garden, where I seem to remember someone flat on his face begging to be let off the hook; and that mention of *carrying his own Cross...* My burden *light*? Am I missing something here?

The Schooling of the Flesh

I believe that the life of a human being is a very specific story of learning, not just in the

intellectual sense, but in every department. I think *what we learn in the body* is every bit as vital as any mental learning. Perhaps this is the area Jesus is talking about in today's Gospel. The relationship we have to our body is not usually a quiet one. It is always crying out for something, always in motion; it is like a child that is always with us, a child with a short attention-span. Watch the behaviour of the body when, for instance, you want to pray. There is always something that must imperatively be done first; the eyes rove about, noticing suddenly the phone, the unanswered letter, the unpaid bill, the unfinished piece of work from two days ago, the partly-read article. A bell rings, and we are on our feet; a sudden pang of hunger, a need to open a window dissipates our concentration. All real truths are old; that the body needs discipline is a truth too old to be news. Still, I feel sure that the call of Christ today is particularly to those whose lives are overwhelmed with *physical* labour and burdens. I've read these words so often beside the beds of the sick and the dying. The labour, the burdens, are already there. Coming to Christ brings rest and relief: his wisdom lightens the load. Learning the royal quality of Jesus is nothing to do with power or glory; it isn't to be learned in the fields where human power is exerted. *He learned obedience through suffering:* his words today call us to a humbler school, in our own familiar flesh, petulant and failing as it is. Here, in our very flesh, is the Cross, close to us, made to our measure. Here is the burden we have to carry home; and here the Kingdom will, or will not, come.

Fr Philip