

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

---

## Change of Heart

Can the leopard change his spots? Maybe. Can a human being change heart? Surely: we all have experience of it, for good and for ill. How many times have we known what Scripture calls “the hardening of the heart”? Distressing when it happens to our own hearts, when we have been bitterly disappointed or betrayed by someone else, it is *terrifying* when someone we have trusted and loved turns a hardened heart towards us; in fact, few experiences could be more devastating.

### For worse - then also for better

If we know that the human heart can turn to ice, then we should also believe that it can turn in the opposite sense as well. We Christians have to believe in conversion, in the possibility of rebirth, in the reopening of the dead springs of life and love. Because this is the work of God, we should also be sure not to set any limits upon it. Our hope is not to be measured amid human limitations; that is why we don't consult merely human notions of goodness when we're trying to find out what is best for us. So what is it that enables us to experience the wonder of a reborn heart? It is *letting ourselves be loved by God*.

### Be still and know that I am God

I have to learn how to rest in God's love. It is a long lesson, requiring much teaching and discipline. It is learned in quietness and with devotion. I must learn to listen more than talking, I must also find peace in sitting still and not asking constant clamouring questions. I am not far from my teacher - so close, in fact, that I can forget his presence. His light is all about me, and I am breathing in and out his life, his Spirit. All that I possess is his gift, and his hand is still on his gifts to me, and my receiving of them is already a share in his life. He does not need me to call on him: he is already here. It is *I* who need to be called to him. No assurance of love could be believed, unless the lover longed to be with the beloved. The clearest way to tell someone we don't care for them is constantly to engineer their absence from us, and ours from them. Yet we try to love God without giving any time to him. We say: *I*

*will love others, and in them I will be loving God.* So we give ourselves permission to make him a stranger, a form of words in a Creed, a concept.

### The Giver of Gifts

The servant who was forgiven his debts was forgiven sixteen times the annual tax for the whole of Judaea. Matthew wants us to imagine an unimaginable sum. This act of grace is therefore similarly fabulous in scale; the king is being divinely generous. The man is presumably grateful, because he has been let off the hook (some hook!) But on “going out” - leaving the presence of the merciful King, not only physically, but spiritually - he finds a man who owes him six months' wages for a labourer. Now he displays his own real, perennial poverty. The royal generosity exercised for him *has failed to change his heart*. The mercy has flowed over him without entering in at all. He is incurably mean.

### Unless you forgive from the heart

Here is the point of the story. We are to forgive one another *from the heart*; and that means that our hearts have got to be changed by the love of this merciful Lord. For this we should not seek within ourselves; we can't fund, from our scanty resources, the kind of forgiveness and kindness God wants of us, envisages for us. Only he can make us sufficiently rich, so that we can resemble and reflect him. *You must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect* - the words of Jesus: if it were a demand, it would slaughter us. It is not a demand: it is a promise.  
*Fr Philip*