

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

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## The King Says: “Come!”

“Bad and good alike”, we are invited to the feast. No-one *deserves* the invitation; it’s the free decision of the king to fill his feast with guests. But having accepted the unexpected invitation, our lives cannot remain so “*undeserving*”. A king has brought us to his banquet, and this must change us. If we say: *I didn’t ask for his invitation, so he can take me as he finds me*, we are refuse our gratitude and - really - refuse the gift. *I’ll come and eat his food, but if he thinks I’m going to behave like his friend, forget it!* This attitude can’t grace the banquet, and the invitation will dishonour host and guest alike.

### What Is Grace?

I would understand by *grace* everything good which enters our life without our having devised and earned it ourselves. A human instinct to feather our own nest may be natural in us. But the things we really treasure in our life are not the things we scramble for greedily, but the things that are given to us as gifts. The love of another person is an overwhelming gift, and can’t be had *except* as a gift. The beauty of friendship comes to us undevised by us. The love of a place, the joy of art or music, the power of coincidences which meet together and suddenly cause us to melt into a sense of harmony and peace: so often the world will suddenly shine, and we enter, or are entered by, a sense of awe and mystery not made by us. Receptivity to moments of grace is the great condition for our knowledge of God, the maker of the world, who moves within it mysteriously, charging it with his life, and hiding in it his glory, which breaks through the veil of banality in epiphanies, glimpses and flashes of insight; these incidents of brilliance are the aftershocks of the Incarnation, in which the eternal life of God takes up our flesh and transfigures it. In this moment we catch sight of what we are for, and that is our assuming of the wedding-garment, which we should long to wear for the future. It is the appropriate attire for all who choose to live in the light of eternity: victims who take the heroic path of forgiveness, prophets who

tirelessly speak “in words that seem to come from God”, keepers of promises made in faith through dark and comfortless times, those who hunger and thirst for justice, and refuse all other food while they are yearning for it. It is the uniform of the Kingdom of God.

### Weeping and Grinding of Teeth

Most of us spend a lot of energy making the best of a bad job. We make a deal with their world, based on our scruffy little beatitude: *Blessed are the hopeless, who shall never be disappointed*. “I’ll abandon hope for anything really wonderful, as long as my world doesn’t serve me up anything really ghastly!” Now, the humble attitude of the Psalmist respects the reality of grace, when it inspires the words: *I have not gone after things too great, nor raised my eyes to marvels beyond me*. Such “going after” the marvellous would proceed from nest-feathering, not from openness to grace. But in the Incarnation of Christ, it is God who calls us to raise our eyes. He summons us to a royal banquet. He invites us to live as his guests, and disregards our poverty. Above all, this approach of God as our host offers us a new place in the world, in which we no longer fear to inherit only bitterness and final disappointment. Being welcomed at the table of the King, we must change the way we live in the Kingdom. Deeds of royal generosity, inspired by the courtesy he has shown to us, are the only worthy response for guests to make. Of course, there is still the old world to live in, where weeping, and hunger, and dishonour set the tone for life.

### Turning The Tide

Maybe we are so penetrated by the demons of disappointment and despair that we can’t imitate the Merchant in Jesus’ story, sell everything and invest in the Kingdom. What we can do is to make sure we never let a day pass without doing something that shines with the Kingdom’s reality, and makes it possible for someone else to look up. We live in a time of

dawning; let there be light in our eyes, and  
hope in our deeds. *Fr Philip*