

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

The Lord Will Make You A House

I'm very fond of my house, even though it isn't mine and one of these days I'll be told to go and live in a different one. I think we all deserve a house to live in, and whatever is needed to make it into a comfortable home for us. But a house built by God? Now that would be something else. In our reading God is promising David a House, not in the sense of a building, but of a dynasty, a *ruling* House. This dynasty will be built by God, and its destiny will be set by God. With the hindsight granted by the risen Lord (who made our hearts burn within us as he spoke to us on the road, and opened the Scriptures to us), the House of David became truly immortal when it gave earthly descent to the Son of God.

My Kingdom Is Not Of This Kind

One of the reasons why the story of the Kings of Israel is so disappointing, is that they so regularly forget their destiny, and become just another tin-pot earthly power. They jump into the arena of politics with both feet, and again and again they lose. It shows that they don't really trust the promises of God. When Jesus is suspected by Pilate of harbouring political ambitions, Jesus hastens to reassure him. He doesn't deny that he is a King, but it isn't that kind of kingship. Instead he is obeyed by all who listen to the truth. No wonder Pilate, who works with a few very basic truths, can "find no fault in him". Yet Pilate is wrong to be so complacent. His Roman kind of kingdom looks much realer to him than this "kingdom of the truth"; but it just isn't. In fact he has everything to fear from the gentle victim he sees before him, so strangely silent, so unmoved by the presence of Pilate's blatant threat: *Do you not know, I have power to crucify you and power to release you?* Anyone with the slightest imagination would shiver at those words. Jesus displays phenomenal powers of imagination, yet he locates Pilate's threat in the overall mystery of God: *you would have no power over me at all, if it had not been given you from above.* Jesus knows where he stands because he lives constantly in the presence of the Father, having one mind with Him and one will. This certainty does not flow from a Covenant like that of Mount Sinai, but from *the Covenant in my blood*; Jesus knows his Oneness with the Father, and that is the House built for him, not with human hands, the house they will try to demolish, with the blunt battering of scourge

and Cross, but which the Father will raise inviolate after three days.

It Keeps Falling Down

Like London Bridge, the human house is a tottering hut, always on the brink of ruin: swept away like the cardboard *favelas* of Rio and the straw thatches of Bangladesh: or toppling disastrously like the Twin Towers of Manhattan. The daily disaster of human death, cradled in the families and homes of the world, quietly seeps into our continents, authoritatively undermining all hopes and projects, throwing visions and love into a hole in the ground. And how do we respond? Still we go on, trying to shore up our earthly dreams, refusing to learn or reflect, hoping impossibly against the fact of death. And it is into that impasse that the Son of God steals, emptied of glory, to inherit from us this death that unites every human story, to carry it compassionately and freely to the end, with a heart set on the kingdom of God. So the most precious thing he came for was just that human emptiness which most needs the fulness of God.

Knowing Our Poverty

Now, it seems to me, we keep trying to fill our emptiness with the very earthly things that leave us confronted with our need; we starve from our plenty, we are poverty-stricken amidst our treasure, like a dying millionaire in the desert, who finds no-one to sell him what he most needs. So today let us give up the struggle, and wait for the One who has the power to save us from death. As humble as our waiting, He comes without terror or divine glory, to be with us, to guide our steps through the valley of darkness, and to lead us out into the paths of peace. *Fr Philip*