

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

## Commandments and Love

The Lord asks a kind of love from us that keeps commandments. Do we know other relationships that work like that?

### Parent and Child

A mother or father is used to commanding children, and children go through a stage where they will be obedient to them. I'm assured that children actually *appreciate* the command which lets them know clearly where they stand and what is expected of them. We can all remember (with pleasure for the most part) that schoolteacher who got the whole class absorbed and quiet with well-explained work that was not too demanding and not too easy to interest us.

### Abbot and Monk

Benedict tells his abbots that their mode of command should "give the strong something to aspire to, without dismaying the weaker brethren". Few people have embodied the love of God in a more humane form than Benedict; and there is a roundness and goodness in the Rule he made for monks that still inspires and warms us. The monastery, when it is what it should be, is a powerful contrast to the way of the world; in it we can see a way of command which leads people into love.

### Child and Parent

There is a real sense in which children command the love of their parents. How soon a crying baby gets his parents on their feet in the middle of the night! How a sick child can command the total resources of his father and mother! And which of us could look on if a little one were in danger, without throwing caution to the winds and risking everything to save him?

### "The Love of Christ Constrains Us"

Paul finds himself "constrained" or "overwhelmed" when he meditates on the loneliness of the death of Christ for all of us; we, he feels, are the ones who *deserved* to die, but Jesus dies innocently in our place. From now on, therefore, we are no longer to live for ourselves, but for him, who died and was raised to life for us.

### Keep My Commandments

Our obedience to Christ *does*, therefore, take root from love. But our love is so inadequate as a response to divine love, that the idea of

commandment is not at odds with it. As a child needs a law to keep, being unsure and perhaps incapable of responsibility, so, in coming to inherit the divine life, we need the authority of the Son of God to guide and direct us. In the Scripture we can see the evidence of his excelling us in the sheer dimensions of his life. The ordinary natural tenor of his life is heroic virtue to us. But the experience of *following Christ* promises to open to us the same realities which burned so brightly in his life. The heroic liberation of our power to love is offered to us in Easter Gospels: *Whoever believes in me will do the same works I do myself; he will do even greater works because I am going to the Father.* This will not be an experience infused into our lives from some celestial force-field. Our God still believes in the incarnation: he uses human nature. When Jesus demands obedience to his commandments, he is talking about a discipline we need on our nature before it can take off into the dimensions of the divine life. It isn't that divinity is *unnatural* to us. It is *supernatural*, and we need to climb, by means of the grace of God, before we can welcome it. It's a shame that the modern world has such a lot of time for self-determination. It's sometimes good to be master of one's own destiny; but it is a great defeat to be at the mercy of one's own limitations. If there is a loving God, who is willing not only to create us but to redeem us, then I think it is worth surrendering our very limited mastery of ourselves, to be lifted up, and taught, and loved, and blessed by him.

*Fr Philip*