

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

The Great Week

The Lord has brought us once again to the Holy Week. Once again the Church calls us, not merely to *remember* the mystery of Jesus' death and resurrection, but to *enter into it*. We do this by that extraordinary power which the liturgy has, to cancel time and space, to make present realities far removed. Can this truly happen?

Does Eternity Meet Time?

We sometimes enjoy, sometimes fear or hate, our progress through time. Time is the truth that constantly brings *change* into our lives; depending on our attitude to the change, we are happy or apprehensive. It's delightful to reach the consummation of a plan long in gestation, or to move from the sense of affliction to a time of healing; it is deeply disturbing to lose those we love, or see commitments weaken and change, or lose the capacity to live fruitfully. Part of us is striving to make things better - that is, to change things. But another part of us longs for an experience *not* limited by time, something perfect, which remains true, whatever time may do. This is a longing for God, and the religious believer seeks for the presence of God amid the tides of time. Can we meet God, in this changing world?

Never Forget The Deeds of God

We believe that God - who is outside time - is also active in the world. As God acts, something eternal irrupts into time. Every now and again we catch a glimpse of the work of God. This gives to certain moments of our *human* experience an *eternal* character and meaning. Supreme among these eternal facts is the life of Jesus. It filled a period at the start of the first century - we're unsure of the dates, they don't matter much - and the lifetime of Jesus is unlike other human biography. His days are like windows through which we can look into the meanings of eternity. The Christian sees them as more than windows: as *doors* through which a believer can pass, to enter the life that is beyond time. First-century eyes saw a man breaking bread at a table in an upper room. They knew his features, his colouring, the gaps in his teeth and the scars on his hands; they saw the marks of his tiredness and watched the working of his feelings. *They knew him in time*. We know him quite differently. They watched, not simply a man breaking a loaf for

twelve companions, but the eternal God feeding his people with eternal food. The original historical facts are no longer to be seen; the bread is gone, the cup long emptied, the disciples' hands that lay on his table stilled in their various deaths. *But the food of eternity has not passed away, nor has the God who was glimpsed in its giving*. What was true on that night before the Passover is true today; and we can encounter this truth by the sacrament which re-presents us with the same living God, giving the same gift from all eternity; and we do this in perfectly human fashion, filling this specific moment of *our* time with all the meanings of the eternal. Our hands too are scarred with the labour, the wounds, and the misdeeds of our life. The bread we bring is the fruit of labour, that crippling cost of life which breaks so many bones and hearts. But the act of God in the liturgy cancels the limits of time and place, so that our hands too rest on the table of the Last Supper, and we breathe the same air as the Twelve who shared with him on that night.

Entry Into Jerusalem

Today begins our most vital time for this entry into the eternal: this week is to be such an entry-point, truly a Holy Week. We are especially blessed to belong to the Catholic Church, which so faithfully retraces his steps in the last days of his life. Every priest on earth will be saying the same thing to all his parishioners today: *Come with the Church through this week. Whoever you are, whatever your state, be as close as you can to the mystery*. In this we only echo the words of the last discourse of Jesus: *Stay in me, as I stay in you. As a branch cut off cannot bear fruit, but must remain part of the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me*. Part of "staying" is sheer endurance: the Chrism Mass, the Lord's Supper, the Cross, the Vigil: a good Holy Week is still a bodily and liturgical marathon. Be as generous as Thomas: *"Let us go to Jerusalem, and die with him."* Fr Philip