

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Without A Word

Mark's sparse account of the calling of Andrew, Peter, James and John may leave us asking what has been missed out. Here is Jesus, walking on the shore, spotting two fishermen – as far as we know, perfect strangers - in their boat; he accosts them, and invites them to follow him; and *immediately* they leave their nets and follow him. What on earth was it that so instantly dissolved their devotion to the fishing industry?

Magnetism?

Some people are said to have an irresistible attraction which can make people forsake all their ties in favour of a sudden fling. For example, literature is full of *femmes fatales* who go through life demolishing marriages, blighting careers, reducing ambition and honour to ashes. But surely the Gospels are not about a man who had the power to hypnotize people into irresponsibility?

How Long Did It All Last?

From John's Gospel we have built up the idea of a three-year ministry (Jesus attends the Passover in Jerusalem three times in this Gospel). But Mark gives no such impression. If you read the Gospel from end to end it seems like the account of a few weeks - a few months at the most. And in each Synoptic Gospel there is only one, fatal visit to Jerusalem by the adult Jesus. So was the discipleship of these Galilean fishermen simply a "fling", a brief aberration which returned them, sore and shame-faced, back to their boats, with a downcast story of fine words that ended with an arrest in the garden for him, and a messy escape to the hills for them? One of them at least comes away naked, having left his tunic in the hands of the arresting officer (Mk 14:51); today he leaves everything to follow Jesus; the end he leaves everything to escape from him.

Frail Brotherhood?

Perhaps their eventual weakness would suggest that they were a bit gullible, easy to entice away. But there is a couple of problems in that analysis: firstly, the quality of Jesus, who radiates a passionate and absolute truthfulness; he is hardly the man to surround himself with a collection of patsies. Secondly, there is the subsequent story of Christianity. How could such a movement emanate from a circle of credulous weaklings prone to

irresponsible fantasy? Do such people make good martyrs? They show sufficient self-interest in fleeing from the Cross for us to reject that image of them.

The Key to the Situation

The heart of attraction is in the radiance of truthfulness, beauty, depth of life, harmony and goodness. If these things shine in a person, we *immediately* respond to them. As time goes on we may find that we made a mistake; perhaps there are truths this person has avoided or concealed: maybe the apparent beauty is a façade; maybe the superficial peacefulness is an expensive lie, which would crumple under the pressure of realities long denied; goodness has to prove itself against the acid test of encounter with evil. I am convinced that these beautiful things *did* radiate uniquely from Jesus of Nazareth, and that the fishermen *could* have arisen "without a word" and followed him. Their attempt to respond to him exposed all the opposite qualities in themselves: their lack of integrity, their self-deception, and their very limited loyalty. In the end, Jesus will be alone when we read Mark's Passion on Palm Sunday this year. The restoration of the Twelve is part of the resurrection. We have the luxury of already knowing it. Let us follow him this year with greater love than in past years.

Fr Philip