

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Unclean Within

The story of the Fall speaks of the *expulsion* of human beings from the presence of God. We don't have to think of this in historical terms, but in spiritual ones. Our human experience isn't lived in the presence of God: we don't meet God face to face; we live on a different plane most of the time, we can ignore him or forget him, and the world will still be there about us, will provide us with the material to make up a life - which may pay no attention at all to God. If the world, in general, *does* live like that, it is a great scandal to those of us who don't, and this is expressed in many of the psalms. They remind me of Private Pike in *Dad's Army*, when Warden Hodges has delivered yet another insult to the fragile dignity of the Captain: *Shoot 'im, Mr Mainwaring, get your gun out an' shoot 'im*. The Psalmist also says to God: *Why do you not destroy the godless? Show them your power, and vindicate your faithful!*

Washing The Vessels

The ritual cleansing that so calmed the minds of the Pharisees in the Gospel does very little to help us meet God. Perhaps "keeping our noses clean" is what we would call much modern morality. We're being told today that what is within you is your own concern, that morality is a matter of personal taste, that it is now OK to live a life which earlier ages would have called disgraceful; and most people have come to believe it. Just don't get caught, just do it privately, and who are you hurting? Well, if I become a monster, I can think of several people who will not be pleased; after all, I still think of my life as a part of several communities, and none of them would welcome anything more monstrous than they already have to cope with. I don't want to belong to a community of façades - false personages with pretty fronts and very dodgy insides. I want to be accepted and to accept others at a very deep level; I want to love and be loved, and nothing less will do. In this sense, the call to look deep into ourselves, and to watch what we allow to come forth from us to others, is a welcome one to me. "Evil intentions" do emerge from my heart; but I have to invest in these awful realities before they can happen. I can't attack them, therefore, by any programme of *external* hygiene, only by the radical purification of the heart, where my desires are born and nurtured.

God's Gift of Desire

I feel sure that desire is a gift from God. It is the herald of redemption, a sign of future hopes. But we mistake it, distort it, so easily. There is a whole industry for *the creation of false desires*: desires that have no root in our nature, whose fulfilment leads to emptiness and pain, and pours our resources away in the process - usually into the pocket of some cynical passing entrepreneur. Watch the ad-men telling youngsters they are not alive until they dress in this way, or drink this, or eat that, or deafen themselves with this noise. Given the right conditions - and they too are to be had for a round figure - *they can sell us anything*; and the fulfilment of the false desire they have sown in us will only lay us open to a further emptiness, and the vulnerability to further false promises, false hopes, and false fulfilments.

Set Your Heart On The Kingdom

Real desires are different. They are the ones God has built into our nature, and to which we can give ourselves wholeheartedly. Above all others is the desire for God himself: *Lord, you have made us for yourself; and our hearts find no rest, until they rest in you*. It is not the expulsion of devils that will heal us, but the healthy growth of truly human desire, that can fill the heart with its light and promise, and make us rich with hope for God.
Fr Philip