

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

When These Things Begin To Take Place

We're beginning a new year of salvation this Sunday; and we are still living in the atmosphere of the Millennium jubilee. Some Jewish people I met recently pointed out that the Millennium means nothing to them; it is just a figure. My attempt to sell them a Jubilee (a moment of pardon, when all debts are remitted, all sold things revert to their original owners, there is a general amnesty for prisoners and exiles, and every person makes a fresh start) met with a very Jewish response: "Yes, you may cancel my debts!". Well, I suspect that the biblical Jubilee may not have had very many celebrations, even in the Jewish past.

Menacing the world

If we were a less private sort of community, I feel we would respond more vividly to the apocalyptic words of Jesus in the Gospel. We are really very private: we have a self-created world, different from the true world, and we preserve it from invasion. Being private, we spend much of our time enclosed, cocooned, in a *personal* experience which may not - perhaps cannot - be shared by others. It is intriguing to create one's own world, by fantasy, by secret responses and links which are purely for our own feeling and understanding. People have their favourite thoughts and images, coloured by completely private responses, which may never be shared with any other soul. This can lead to a rich inner life; but it can also lead to a form of withdrawal from other people or from reality, so that they look into our eyes and read nothing there; everything has retreated to an inner world labelled "Trespassers will be prosecuted"! In these circumstances, it means little to talk about "the fate of the world". What matters to me is my little, internal world, and such people as I've let into it. What menaces that world is *reality!* Keep reality away from me, don't let the truth in, don't burst my balloon. Now, if we're afraid of what isn't true, we can be helped. If we fear the truth, life is going to be hard!

Apocalypse

The truth of God has a habit of breaking in. It feels like a *vision*, a *revelation*. Suddenly the

walls of confusion melt, the scales fall from our eyes, and we *see* the truth. The experience is all sorts of things to all sorts of people: to the oppressed, exiled, or disparaged, ravishingly wonderful: to the oppressor, the tyrant, the godless, devastatingly awful. There's always a visitation of judgment involved, as the various "realities" we have all chosen to live in melt down to reveal *the* reality of God in their place. When we pray asking God "Send forth your light and your truth" we are praying for this unveiling to happen, and know that it will cost us the cosy sham of reality we've made friends with. When we feel the shuddering collapse of our wealth, the fragility of our relationships, or the foundering of the flesh, when our brains won't function, our emotions stay comfortless, or our teeth start to fall out, there is a foreshadowing of that utter dissolution with which God will finally remind us that we are creatures first and last, and that he alone, and no human being, is the Lord of life and of history. It must be a frightful lesson to learn, even for the holiest of us. In some way we can see the human flesh of Jesus recoiling before it, as he says: *Not my will, but your will be done*. There is something we can do, however: we can watch ourselves, so that our hearts are not *coarsened by debauchery, drunkenness, and the cares of life, so that the Day overtakes us suddenly, like a trap*. Jesus said: *I am the truth*; and also: *The truth will make you free*. With that in mind, we can say: the more we make our peace with the Truth, the less we have to live crippled by fear. Fr Philip

Editors Note:

The original BoB for this Sunday is missing. However this one was written but never used for year 2000/01 to which it relates. I have chosen to place it here rather than not use it at all even though it refers to the Millennium.