

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

A New Jerusalem

Today the Gospel does that puzzling thing: *commands us to love*. This cuts across every modern conception of what love is. From Chaucer (*When mastery cometh, the God of Love anon Beteth his wings, and farwel! He is gon* - Chaucer couldn't spell) to the Beatles (*Can't buy me love*) the idea of love is totally alien to the thought of constraint. Whole dramas have been written to express this truth, and most films about personal relationships hammer home the lesson, usually pretty mawkishly, but with complete conviction. So how comes it that the person the human race still respects as the greatest authority on love seems able to hand out a *commandment* to love?

Quite Important

This isn't a trivial issue. Love is our ultimate good (so we say *God is Love*) the greatest of all possible human values. The general opinion in our bit of the world is that it comes and goes like a disease, it's unpredictable and uncontrollable, and that there are some people we can love because they happen to turn us on (the lovable) or because we turn them on (their hearts are in the right place) and there are others we can't love because they don't turn us on (unlovable) or because they don't like us (inhuman). If that's what love is like, then the world will go on being as cold and heartless as so many find it to be now; from God's point of view, it will remain unsaved, and the story of the crucifixion will need to be re-enacted in life after life.

A Gift that you Do

What the Cross says to this, is that love is indeed a gift - not something that comes with breathing and thinking, therefore; but that this gift *has been given to us* in the incarnation and human life of the Son of God. The gift was pure grace, and we could have been left without it if God had been somehow less than pure love; but *God is Love*, and the gift *has been given*; and because of that there is no longer room for the human beings to decide that anyone is hopeless. Some people don't look deserving; but Jesus came to us, lived and died for us, not because we deserved it, but because he is Love. He is now the presiding *fact* about the human race, and about all human beings, regardless of their loveliness or ugliness, their disabilities or skills, their worthiness or unworthiness. It is in the name of his incarnation that judgment is given in favour of humanity, and of all human beings; this makes our self-based motives of vengeance and condemnation into assaults on the majesty of God, who so loved the world that he gave us his Son. This

is not romantic love which strikes like lightning. It is a deliberate decision to make a new world founded on love, whose way has been shown to us in real, live history.

Making All Things New

The paschal mystery which is the Risen Christ renews Creation. When he breathed on the disciples on Easter Night, and said *Receive the Holy Spirit*, the story of Genesis was renewed where *God breathed into the clay the breath of life, and man became a living being*. More dramatically, *the breath of God stirred over the waters of the deep*: something greater even than a recreation of humanity is afoot; the whole Universe is swept by the wind of the Spirit, that Love which unfolds in time and space the realities of eternity. Easter, if we perceive it, reveals the Glory of God, and its revelation is what Jesus prays for when he cries out *Father, glorify your Name!* Now we can see how it is possible for Jesus to command us to love. To see love as that sentimental, basically selfish thing that Hollywood has consecrated and sent into the world is to lose the Glory of God, shining in the paschal mystery. Love no longer has to be mined out of the exhausted seams of the human heart alone. It flows into us in the Father's gift, the Spirit of sons and daughters reborn in Christ. You are not commanded (impossibly) to recreate your own life in the image of some divine model, but to let the Father of light fulfil the good work he began in you. Being a disciple of Christ is not entertaining a good idea: it is coming to terms with a completely new Creation.
Fr Philip