

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

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## To Be With Christ Where He Is

You can be *with people* in merely bodily terms. It is how you are with people in a crowded lift in a store. You get in. There are already fifteen passengers. They (sort of) make room for you, each staring blankly forwards. The doors close, and open, and there is a testy little shuffle as people who've become boxed in at the back push forwards to get out. The doors close again...only a little child, usually strapped in to a pushchair and practically on the floor, can humanise the situation. There are only three floors for us, so it is soon over. It must be quite a saga in New York.

### “I can well imagine” vs. “I see”

The sort of presence-to-one-another that matters is the one where we begin to see what the other person sees, where we cross from our side to his. We still need to stand together, looking the same way, but this time we are trying to get another's view of the world. No longer are we *imagining* what he experiences: we are trying to experience it with him. Surely this is the way it was when the Son of God came to be where we are. He came to stand where we stand, and see what we see, and to be a perceptible actor in our drama. The New Testament is often eloquent on this theme, speaking of the closeness of Christ to our lives with an immense and reverent gratitude. In him we see the Word of God trying all ways to make sense to us. Truly we can feel that he saw what we see; and we can furthermore say with John “We saw his glory!”

### Being Where Christ Is

This is (in the aftermath of Ascension) *a tall order*; like the baby in the pushchair, we are anchored to earth, and spend much time only imagining what it is like to be tall, no longer surrounded by the kneecaps of the big people who run the world. In spiritual terms, we must find some way that is more than imagination, to *grow to the full stature of Christ*, to be with him where he is. Is his prayer that this may be so only a prayer for the end of time, a dream for heavenly fulfilment? I think that it is more. It is like his prayer for us to be one: visionary, indeed: but calling for instant action, an agenda for today. We have to start this work, to see the world through Jesus' eyes, to look at the people as he looked at them, seeing what he sees. In my daily visits to the hospital, I see the people who are undergoing the same treatment I undergo. There are husbands and wives, offering the most accurate care to each other, obviously totally together in the experience. There are others who are alone, young and old, some looking reasonably sound, others looking very anxious. I wonder what Jesus would have made of them. I feel

sure he would have felt at home in the situation, knowing how to communicate faith and confidence. He was not in need of the Cross to teach him how to confront suffering; he knew what it was from the beginning, and he knew that God has the power to undo its chains and to liberate. I have been trying to help cancer patients for years. Now that I am one of them, I can speak with greater authority about what it is like. But still there is always a great way to go: my suffering isn't yours, and to share the experience still takes a leap of trust, a capacity to listen on both sides.

### The Kingdom Is Among You

It is vital that we do not pass through this “vale of tears” as ambassadors of a foreign power. Our hope is not “pie in the sky when you die”. It is a virtue which engages *this* moment, which incarnates itself here and now. It cries out to see *this* experience as a moment of salvation, and if this moment remains unsavable, the whole mystery of salvation is called into question. We moderns find the miracle-stories of the Gospel difficult, but this is what they are saying: when Jesus meets the unsaved, salvation is possible *then and there*. If we can see the world as Jesus sees it, salvation may become possible for us too. But we see the unsaved world, and just wring our hands, and bemoan the state of it, and display our total lack of hope. Come, Holy Spirit! Give us the eyes of faith, and help us to know the truth about what we see! As we endure pain, make us free from its power!  
*Fr Philip*