

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Peter and Paul, Apostles

The word *apostle* carries for a Catholic a truly princely force and dignity. That the twelve should have been called by Christ means more than any other earthly distinction. They are builders in this world of the world to come, fellow-architects of the new Jerusalem, people whose earthly meaning is taken up and made part of the story of salvation. Think of the love of Jesus as he first looked at them. Did he choose them like an earthly employer, estimating their strengths, selecting them to meet certain needs? I'm not sure. Jesus uses a discernment which exactly matches what is said of God in the Old Testament.

God and the Heart

When Samuel takes his oil, knowing that God is leading him to choose a king, he is led to anoint Saul, handsomest, tallest, strongest of all his tribe. But Saul's reign came to a sticky end. God sends Samuel out again, and directs him to Jesse's house, to anoint a king among his sons. This time it is not the eldest or the best-looking: God says: *Take no notice of his stature, or his looks, for I have rejected him; God does not see as humans see; they judge by appearance: the Lord looks at the heart.* It is the youngest and littlest that God chooses: David.

Jesus Called Twelve

The call of the apostles is unaccompanied by signs of earthly success. These are simple men whose life consists in local and humdrum wisdom, the lore of the fisherman or small-town businessman. These are people who could say with the Psalmist: *I have not gone after things too great, nor marvels beyond me.* But in Jesus they find their small world has been invaded by someone very much beyond their vision or understanding - unpredictable, unfathomable, inescapable, unforgettable; his approach to them is curiously empty - offering nothing comfortable or familiar, he yet captures their hearts in a dramatic obedience which diverts the whole course of their lives. In their following they embody the classic pattern of Christian discipleship, and become the teachers of the earth in the things of eternity. That is why their calling ennobles them, and makes them the most precious of the saints.

As I Have Loved You

If Jesus' choice was not carried out by earthly criteria, do we know why he *did* pick them? Can we discern his rules of choice? Certainly it was because he found them *lovable*. The apostles were to be charged with teaching the world the love of Christ:

"By the love you have for each other, people will know you for my disciples." This love was not to proceed from themselves, but from God: "It is not we who loved God, but God who loved us, and sent his Son to expiate our sins." So I am convinced that Jesus chose them because they had the capacity to be loved by him in just the way that would open them to this apostolic work. "I give you a new Law: that you love one another as I have loved you." What could possibly have prepared them for such a mission, except the capacity to be loved?

Recipe for an Apostle

So there is the curious recipe: a capacity to be loved, a willingness not to understand, and yet to follow: a readiness to be changed, and to receive gifts they don't yet know how to ask for. Jesus saw these qualities, not in gifted, motivated, powerful people, but in simple and uneducated ones. In this he loves with the Creator's love, who chooses the world in all its raw incompleteness and capacity for failure, its powerful yearning and unslakeable thirst for the future. In Peter and in Paul we have the images of the two best-known members of the College of Apostles. It is easy to find their character in the stories about Peter, in the letters of Paul. As well as honouring them, listening to them, and receiving the gifts they transmit to us, we should look at them as Jesus looked at those in whom he saw the potential for ministry: Mark tells us: "Jesus looked steadily at him, and loved him." These apostles are not figures who represent some theory or other, but live people that Jesus knew, and loved, and chose. *Fr Philip*