

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

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## If You Say So, I Will

Obedience is not always easy, but there are times and places when it goes without question. There are moments in the lives of parents and teachers when they find to their joy that their youngsters are being easily and unquestioningly obedient. The relationship is immeasurably enhanced by such times, because what the elder wants to give is being perfectly received by the younger, in the spirit it was offered; there is welcome, affirmation, and generosity that is so solid as to need no words. Equally, there are many other times in our life when *we* know we're incompetent to act for ourselves, and we become anxious to make no difficulty for the ones who know how to help us. No-one who is drowning should hold a discussion about whether to grab the rope thrown by the lifeboatman. No-one who needs healing should ignorantly instruct his doctor.

### Getting Facts Straight

It seems that *obedience to Christ* requires two very closely-related realizations on our part: first, the realization that we need saving; second, the realization that he can and will save us. I suppose that every Christian's religious story is written about these two pennies dropping.

### We Need Saving

Strong people sometimes become so self-reliant that they find it difficult to know their need for salvation. They may even be afraid to face it, for fear that such knowledge undermine their confidence. If you spend your whole life building up self-reliance, it strikes fear to your soul to think you need saving! For such people, times of anxiety - even great fear - may come as times of grace. Many a human relationship has been saved because of such times of realization; our relationship with God can be re-opened in just the same way. What dawns in such an experience is the *truth*; that's really vital. It is perfectly and utterly true that, by myself, I cannot fulfill my desires or my promise. My life

can only reach its fulfillment by being given to, and received by, others. My salvation, in other words, lies somewhere outside myself, and I can't earn it or make it happen by myself

### Christ Can And Will

Such knowledge is very frightening unless I can believe that salvation is possible. This is where the second realization comes into play. In the Gospel we find people who know the depth of their need flocking to Jesus of Nazareth. He did not offer them some kind of citizen's charter or social contract. Like the obedient children at the top of this page, they did not need to spell it out. They knew that he had authority over what they feared. They felt in his presence that they were radically safe, that there was hope, that he understood further than they did, and that he saw the way for them to reach a place of rest and joy. In the voices of the apostles and evangelists we hear the echoes of this realization, and the urgency of the message for us. Is this how we respond to Christ - with that instinct to be at rest in his presence, to have our anxieties radically stilled? If so, the learning of our needs becomes a different experience: we can enter into our poverty with a completely different spirit. We shall be finding, not a desolate and despairing part of our existence, but the place where the joy of salvation is about to be revealed. I can't help thinking that this was where Jesus met Peter in today's Gospel, and where Peter begged him to go away and leave him in his sins. Jesus is very kind to Peter in his response. *Don't be afraid. From now on you will fish for people.* That was the saving of him; salvation for the fisherman he already was.

*Fr. Philip*