

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Blessing and Curse

Happy the person who knows the difference between the two! It's a clear distinction, as we look at the two words side by side; could anyone confuse them? I fear so. Again and again we find ourselves mistaking a great curse for a great blessing, and forfeiting for it as for a pearl of great price; some people will move heaven and earth to inherit a curse they mistakenly think of as a blessing. Conversely, we can run a mile from what we think is a curse, not knowing that it may be our last or only chance of a blessed life. How sadly we sometimes watch, as a friend destroys the most precious hope of happiness he will ever know!

Accepting Things

We need humility if we are to find the path of blessedness. When we get the bit between our teeth, we can impose our will on the world, and go a long way towards making the future do what we want. It is a disarming fact that we so often find great disappointments in this way. It doesn't take great wisdom to recognise that we sometimes do the best things, *in spite of ourselves*; it's when we are not sure, when we loosen our grip on the controls, that our lives have a chance of being blessed. We can't, in the end, bless ourselves. I always think with great compassion of those people who have spent every effort of their lives to wrestle their world into proper shape, and made it totally obedient to themselves, and who reach the point where it perfectly reflects its ruler. Then they decide that they don't really like it. The big house has no peace or rest, the huge bank-account won't say what it's there for, the splendid car doesn't want to go anywhere, and instead of being a pageant of civilised enjoyment, life is empty and uncomfortable. *It is not good that man should be alone*; and when we allow another, or others, or God to be with us, we begin to have things done to us rather than just doing things to ourselves; instead of actors, we become sufferers, and then we can pipe down and listen instead of speaking, receive instead of giving, accept instead of imposing. The characteristics of this mode of being are silence rather than noise, stillness rather than motion, waiting rather than striving, contemplating rather than explaining: virtues of passivity, of *patience*.

How are you this morning, Doctor?

I often meet doctors who have long ago forgotten how to enter this mode of being. Everyone expects them to be active, generous, tireless people, always giving out answers, knowing the way, guiding others, taking charge. So they do that. It is always *disarming*, in just the way described above, to find someone like that in a hospital bed. But I offer you the picture today of a doctor in a hospital bed, being ministered-to by other doctors, and by nurses. At first it seems strange, undignified, as someone once said: *Physician, heal thyself*. But humanity is worth more than professional competence. It's being human that counts; and human beings – even with medical degrees - have to be givers and receivers both. Perhaps *the only way for us to be blessed* is sometimes to be loaded with what looks suspiciously like a curse; to be blighted as the person we were making ourselves, in order to make room for the real person God always wanted to make us. So, should something come along that sends an effortless but authoritative torpedo straight through your most important plans, don't complain too soon. It may be that someone who loves you with more than human love has something to say to you to which, until now, you have never had the time to listen. Perhaps you are on holy ground.

Fr
Philip