

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Relationship

"It is not good for man to be alone," says God in Genesis 2. I suppose that makes this sentence the first divine judgment about us to be uttered; if so, we can agree that it is as momentous a statement as we could ask for. We do have time for experience that is solitary: but principally because in being humanly alone we can find our way to the ultimate *communion* - with God. From the beginning, therefore, we find our value not in splendid isolation, but in relationship. Easter is the deepest guarantee of this truth.

Jesus the Son

Jesus came to reveal God to us. He came as a human being - destined, therefore, for human relationship: being a man, *it was not good that he should be alone*. The way in which Jesus related to people was already in the Holy Spirit, who descended upon him at his Baptism: he related to people in a totally life-giving mode. That is the meaning of the healing miracles: his love *always* gave life. When *we* relate to one another, there is a whole range of possibilities. Sometimes the circumstances are favourable, we experience a moment of grace, our natural selfishness takes a break, and we find ourselves accepting the gift of the Holy Spirit: we are able to love, and our love gives life. Sometimes we call what goes on by all the right names, we have all our credentials in order, but our lives are at sixes and sevens: we accept hidden selfishness as genuine love, we enrobe greed or possessiveness in a uniform of respectability, and we produce a ghastly parody of genuine love, a distorting-mirror held up to the face of God. With Jesus, this never happened. He lived his life *sinless* - in total relationship with the Holy Spirit, and he could truly say that his whole life was a carrying-out of the will of his Father.

The Holy Spirit

When we use theological language about the Holy Spirit, we say that he is a Person, equal to the Father and to the Son, that he is the love that they offer to each other. The Father breathes the Spirit upon the Son (as at his baptism in the Jordan river), and the Son breathes the Spirit to his Father (as at the moment of his death) and together they send the Holy Spirit upon the Church (as in the mystery of Pentecost). The Holy Spirit has been poured out upon us: and thus we are offered liberation from our selfish isolation, and freedom to relate to God the Father as his sons and daughters, to Jesus as his brothers and sisters, by means of the Spirit who lives in us and makes the life of God present to us. We can never claim to be isolated or lonely again; we are in

community with the Trinity and will always be so: and the closeness that is offered to us there is closeness to the uttermost life, to the very fulness of joy, to the totality of true love. This is what the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is like: it radically cancels our loneliness, and permeates our being with the acceptance and love of the God of earth and heaven, as if he said constantly over us: *You are my beloved son, or daughter: my delight is in you*.

Love One Another

The Holy Spirit becomes in us a wellspring of love from which we must draw the true love we long to give to each other. So my love for others is an experience of communion, not a solitary or self-generated quality of my own. In learning to love one another we are seated before Christ as he washes the feet of his disciples: in the experience of generosity we are experiencing the operation of the Holy Spirit: in uniting our lives within the Church we come, as the glorious risen Body of Christ, into the presence of the Father. All of these mysteries demand *relationship* and go to war with loneliness. Surely we can claim that the Holy Spirit is our way of relating, the gift of the Father, the Spirit of sons and daughters, the bond of love: because at the very heart of God we have revealed to us, not an awesome and lonely Monarch, but a Trinity of perfect lovers, "a community of divine Persons", in relationship with whom we are destined to find our true and everlasting home. It occurs to me to remark that, just as for a Christian there can be no such thing as tragedy - because our victory over the forces that destroy humanity is already won - so there can never be such a thing as rejected or unrequited love. Love is never unreturned, because even if a human being refuses to respond to us, God never does. In the fourth Gospel Jesus often tells us that he is acting, not out of his relationship with other human beings, but out of his relationship with the Father. However lonely our struggle to relate, it is a mirror held up to God who is love, and who has made me in his own image. Whatever people may do to us, this community with God endures and is valid. If when our day is ended, we have little to show by way of earthly achievement, our effort to be generous will yield its full harvest in the Kingdom.
Fr Philip