

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

## Thou Art Gone Up On High

Last week saw an unusual number of people looking up into the sky – the eclipse. Something told me that the train-fare to Truro would be wasted expenditure, and the television programme showing people watching the eclipse on television on a dark beach (and cheering) was faintly absurd. In fact the sky over Wollaton was quite clear, and so at the last minute I found an old birthday card, stuck a corkscrew through the cover of the Diocesan Year Book, and did my Patrick Moore Pinhole Projection on the front doorstep. It was all rather forgettable, and the eclipse looked like a toenail clipping.

### A Great Sign In Heaven

The Solemnity of the Assumption calls us to look up. We need it. Although we have a clear vocation to look at the world, and to get stuck in to its betterment with all our power, we don't belong in this sad set-up, nor do we draw our meaning from its very absorbing struggles, be they won or lost. Not that we don't take them seriously. In fact we are enabled to enter into the world with far greater freedom because we are not asking it to explain us, or justify us, or reward us, as people do who belong to it heart and soul. The Assumption of Mary gives us a glorious sense of accomplished holiness, making us feel that God has indeed made his way into our nature, so that we can find our way into his.

### The Magnificat

The Canticle of Mary forms the Sunday Gospel this week. Many people think of it as a hymn *to* our Lady, whereas it is a hymn *of* our Lady to the God who “raises the lowly”. In reading it we should hear the voice of the one who sang it, and realise that there is here a whole theology of hers, a perfect account of Mary's relationship with God. In this lyrical poem we can read the greatness of our salvation, in which she plays so pivotal a role. A pivot is something which enables something else to turn; in this case, the hinge on which the door of salvation swings open is Mary herself, who gave her life to the mystery of the Incarnation with a grace-filled generosity. That she did this is a work of grace, a personal gift to her from the God who made her, and blessed her with her especial quality: as Gabriel says, “full of grace!” If such openness was itself God's gift, then we can celebrate its consequences in today's Solemnity, with its image of a human being “raised to the

heights”. My job in the world is to discover the way in which I too can be a “pivotal” person, enabling the change which we call salvation in the lives of others. I need to be able to say *The Lord has done marvels for me: holy his name*. In that sense there is a new reason for me to gather the awareness I have of the work of God, so that I can sing my Magnificat like Mary. If I am merely a reporter of other people's experiences, I am a poor Evangelist. For a moment, some of the people who watched the eclipse seemed to get a sense of the great structure that is the solar system. The Assumption should give us the same sense of wonder in the structure of salvation, the work of God in making our nature divine. It is as if the dimensions of our nature are themselves being transformed, as the boundaries of the passing world melt, and become transparent to the unlimited, to the Eternal.

### All Generations Will Call Me Blessed

I suppose Catholics are unique in their remembrance of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The Orthodox honour her, but in quite a different way, perfectly expressed in the icon tradition, showing Mary in a stern simplicity (which perhaps grew out of mosaic rather than the skills of painters). We have the preaching of St Francis behind us, which reminded us to see Jesus and Mary as human beings, and to enter into their earthly experience by our imagination. In this way we have valued our saints, and have come to value our own experience too. We read the Psalms, whether we are passing through the valley of the shadow of death, or raised on high in a moment of liberation. All times are for us times of salvation, and we can never raise our eyes too high: the promises of God are not on a human scale, but divine.

This knowledge is what came to Joseph as he dreamed, and heard an angelic voice tell him not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife, because what was conceived in her was of the Holy Spirit. Our feast celebrates the end of the story, as we see the final consequence of the work of grace in Mary.

*Fr Philip*