

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

The Last Judgment

Our capacity to judge is what makes us human. But just as we all fall short of true humanity, we all fall short of true judgment; we all *can* make mistakes, we all *do*, and their consequences can sometimes dog us all through our lives. Do we ever get it really right? Will there be a final judgment?

True Judgment

Our faith is that, in the end, there will be a judgment passed on all creation that is *not* false, treacherous, partial, ill-informed, or prejudiced. In the end, the truth is going to be told about us and about all we've had to deal with, work with, and put up with. Suddenly, if you think about it, you can find great consolation in this fact. All your life you have suffered from bad judgments, your own and other people's. In the end, a verdict will be found which is true with the truth of God; and this will be known to all, so that there is no more vestige of untruth left in all creation. Is it so hard to rejoice in that? Only if we have not thought about it, with the profundity it deserves.

The End Of Vanity

Vain people are content with superficial good repute. *If people think better of us than we deserve, they say, so much the better. It would be silly to enlighten them; let them go on in their ignorance; it does no harm.* And indeed, few of us would be prepared, in isolation, to have the full truth about us disclosed. But of course the Last Judgment will not leave us in isolation; it is a *general* judgment, and all humanity will be revealed with us. Can you imagine what that will be like? A demolition of the barriers behind which people hide. A total abolition of masks and all the reasons for wearing them. A tearing-off of disguises, a vision of people as they are - "God's work of art". What a huge explosion of glorious truth it will be! Think how much we shall see of the hidden virtue of the world: all the years of forbearance and forgiveness, all the years of unrewarded fidelity and self-giving, and every secret impulse towards acceptance and generosity. So much goodness is concealed - we are so much more interested in publicizing iniquity. But God is an unremitting shepherd, leaving the ninety-nine to search out the lost one; the eye of God is even capable of filleting out the good which lies hidden, even in the fabric of sin. There is no such thing as a purely sinful act, much less a

completely sinful person. When Jesus says: *Father, I have watched over the ones you have given me, and not one is lost*, we can presume that the mind that furnishes the Last Judgment will *lose nothing* that is good about any of us. However deformed or stunted by evil, there is goodness in the worst of us, and even the worst of our actions. God sees even this goodness, and does not let it be lost.

Who, Me?

Perhaps this is part of the reason for the surprises that are so clear in today's Gospel. The righteous and the unrighteous are equally bemused by the terms of the verdict: *when was that*, they say, *when did we see you?* I always find this a source of wonder. Clearly, in the space beyond our awareness, God is discerning our quality, weighing our choices. This is only fearful if his appraisal is subject to falsehood. If it is the divine gaze that rests on us, then we are known to the depths, and understood, and (if we seek it) pardoned by the one who first chose us to live in his world. If we live at great distance from the heart of the mystery, if we are blind to the greatness of God's loving plan, does that constitute any hardship for him? I think not. The only obstacle appears to be that hardening of the heart against pity and help for the poor, which prevents our lives opening, and keeps them in a tight, frozen, and finally hopeless state, like those first buds that are blasted by the frost, and never come to bloom. That we can dress up in all kinds of masks; but in the end, the truth is: *I came to you, and you would not receive me.*

God Of Surprises

There are people who make me ask, *Why did God make you?* They don't fit in to the world *I'd* have designed. But God did make them, and his purpose for them is part of the Last Judgment revelation. Suddenly we shall see as he sees, and the glory of his design will burst upon our gaze. That is going to make us love them all, to love everything that God's hand has formed. How long can you wait before that light dawns?
Fr Philip

