

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

“Would You Like To See The Garden?”

The voice of the garden calls us back, to come out, to pretend that we are still at home in the open air. Gardens are necessary as never before for us, who so depend on the sophistication of our houses. Not that we are *prisoners* of luxury - are we? - but there's part of our being that is asphyxiating in the air-conditioning. We're so much in control of our personal cocoon that we forget the world beyond it. Intellectually, of course, we know there is a world (outside the double-glazing) that's very different from the upholstered version we've created. Then there is the (awful) world we safely glimpse through the cathode window of the telly. But you can always turn it off, or look at a video. So we're still in charge, and thank goodness for it!

Venturing Forth

The garden is a first step out of our controlled environment. Leave the four walls and the GFCH, find real soil under your feet, hear the wind (careful, you never know where it's been) in the trees, and sense heaven knows what crawling, flitting, sprouting, budding and bursting around you; you are unlikely to be seriously eaten or attacked, and it's not far to safety if it starts to do something unpleasant.

God in the Garden

There are gardens in the story of our faith, and these we must visit in our pilgrimage. The poet Edwin Muir believed that our life begins in the experience of Eden, and then gets corrupted, by sophistication and greed, to a banished, imprisoned life haunted by the memory of lost bliss. This chimes with the opening of the Bible: that dreamlike story of a woman weighing the command of her Creator against her own eyes, heart, and mind, and venturing to set the Eternal among them as an optional extra, an element of *her* world. The loss of the garden follows, with a guard set to seal it shut to us; and so it becomes a haunting memory, in a hard and hostile world.

Gethsemane

It must be Adam's ghost-garden that Jesus enters on the night of his arrest, but the ground to which he falls is the hardened earth Adam (far from upholstered) had to till. Here begins the great experience of loss which is the Passion (*Could you not watch one hour? Do you betray the Son of Man with a kiss? They all deserted him and ran away.... Why have you forsaken me?*) In this garden of agony there is an olive-press, and its crushing yields the oil for anointing; so it is that Thursday in Holy Week is the day for consecrating the Chrism.

Unless a seed fall to the ground and die.... Is Gethsemane *barren* ground? Prayer in it seems unanswered, but it is visited by an angel to give power of endurance. Is a burial-ground barren? Because it is in a garden that the body of Jesus is buried as the evening is falling. A garden is never more mysterious than now, full of small sounds as the darkness gathers. It is here the Christian must wait, watch, before a guarded stone too great for him to move. Now at last human beings have stolen back to the garden, waiting on God because their own powers are at an end (*no looks to attract our eyes, our hearts broken with taunts, our mind exhausted by what we have been told*).

Enter the Woman

It is not a new-born Eve, appraising the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, but Mary of Magdala, from whom seven demons have been cast out, who comes to the garden blinded with tears, on this Passover morning, itself haunted for centuries by the memory of past salvation. How brilliant that she should “mistake” the figure she half sees as “the Gardener”! There are few real *mistakes* in the Gospel. The man she sees is the heir to the vineyard, the inheritor of the oil-press, the anointed one, the new Adam, the first-born of Creation. She is the first to know him risen from the dead, the first human being to know the wild gospel of Easter. Every Christian can reach this moment, where the site of agony, the empty grave, becomes the place of realization, in the dawn of Easter. It is the weeping that makes it so powerful a joy. It is the transfiguring of all human truth. “You must come and see the garden.” *Fr Philip*