

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Once More, Lord

Once more the ceremony of Palm Sunday calls us to Jerusalem, and we enter that state so characteristic of Holy Week - a condition where we are dominated by realities invisible to the busy world. Everything that makes up our ordinary day finds itself opened to the great truths of this time; and this is a direct legacy of the One who dies in the heart of its mystery, enacted on this earth of ours.

Going Into Town

What do we want, what are we looking for when we come into town? Jesus enters Jerusalem because he wants to "speak to its heart"; the people who meet him, far from passing him in the anonymous crowd which makes life so difficult for us, become orientated to him, polarised by him; they soon form into a procession, doing what he does, accompanying him on his way. We never enter our city as Jesus entered his. He enters Jerusalem worthy to be called "Son of David". By comparison, we simply use the world for our private purposes.

Washing

Feet first, and then hands - two washings in the story of this week make this ordinary deed extraordinary. In the charged atmosphere, intimate and apprehensive, which makes the setting of the Last Supper, Jesus finds the perfect sign to the Way of the Cross. The washing of his disciples' feet (*Now you do not understand - later you will*) displays at once his utter humility, in making himself a slave, and his regal authority, as one capable of laying down his life in perfect, sovereign freedom. We couldn't do it, because we're not sufficiently in charge of ourselves, we're not at home in ourselves as he is. His complete self-possession enables a complete self-giving. Not so Pilate. Despite his being clad in the vesture of power, he is incapable of a free response to Jesus. Pilate's washing of his hands speaks of the opposite pole of human experience, where we deny responsibility for our lives, and thus evade the real meaning of our actions. That two such different meanings could belong to so similar an action is a disturbing thought. Humanity itself is similarly ambivalent. In my cynicism, I note that the very palm we use as a memorial of that entry into Jerusalem will form the ashes of next year's season of repentance; then I remember that I haven't the slightest reason to believe that I will see another Lent, another

season of holy opportunity: and I'm called back to the present moment - the essential place, where alone the Liturgy can be celebrated; and here I stand, for good or ill, with Jesus at the gates to Jerusalem, the gateway to the Passion.

Breaking the Bread

The most common chore - feeding the family: here it is, in Holy Week, swept up into the Eternal, vibrant with the meaning of every life that is fed, and with the fullness of the hand that feeds. How we've wandered through these meanings: seed and plant, harvest and mill, yeast and oven, gathering the family, breaking and sharing the bread; how deeply the human symbolism of the wine speaks to us, the images of vine and vintage, crushing the grape and saving the wine, keeping and serving it, the symbolism of table and cup. But has anyone ever spoken so deeply of these realities as Jesus, in the simple words which create the heart of the Mass: *my Body, broken for you, my Blood shed for you, for all, for the Covenant, for the forgiveness of sins?* Is any understanding deeper, anywhere, of what it can mean to feed, or to be fed?

Carrying the Burdens

Cities are full of people carrying goods and shopping, luggage and rubbish. Bearing the burdens of humanity, Jesus climbs the long hill. The demands of this journey out of the city are past our fathoming. They are met from the generous heart of the Son of God. His rejection and condemnation are total; he will come out of this story with nothing left to him that human hands might have stolen. His tenacity is all focused on *the carrying of the Cross* - which is wanted for his final purpose, the last essential which will enable him to *accomplish* the will of the Father.

Coming to Rest

The laying to rest of Jesus at the end of Good Friday opens our own nightly weakness and tiredness to the meaning of the Gospel; Jesus shared our exhaustion, and came at last to rest. The meaning of this sleep was drawn, not from his exhaustion, but from the eternal meaning of his awakening.

Fr Philip