

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

The Heart's Knowledge

When we speak of our *heart* (not the pump of the bloodstream, I don't mean, but the core of our personality) we are speaking of a complex realm, whose geography can be considered and surveyed in many different ways. The *mind*, for instance, has capacities and pathologies of its own, to be measured by psychology and by medicine, by the measurement of brainwaves and by philosophical analysis; yet Hopkins the poet truly wrote: *O, the mind, the mind has mountains; cliffs of fall Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed. Hold them cheap May who ne'er hung there.* The "fathoming" of these places of terror is not merely a task for scientists. Equally we can set endocrinologists on the trail of our *emotions*, ascribing courage to a tide of adrenalin, or desire to a build-up of testosterone. But a life lived in obedience to *The Reader's Digest Book Of Hormones* would not fulfil our longing for humanity. We know we're more than chemicals!

What I Have Learned And Understood

The journey of every heart is unique, and whilst Wisdom is single and universal, and belongs to God, our finding it is personal, and various, and partial. We learn Wisdom in the scattered and divided fields of a world that is fallen, as much in our sins and suffering as in our prayer and joy. There is a marvellous economy in all of this. I know of many times in my life which I would dread to relive. Even remembering the scars I carry from them, however, I know that they have made me understand, and to be a wounded person is not to be damaged or even unfairly abused. To use the old analogy, a broken egg, whilst it loses a lot, should rejoice in becoming a triumphant soufflé, rather than pining after the sheen of its lost shell. In the same way, it is good for me to reflect on the loss and gain I've experienced, in order to reach some kind of peace with the mystery of my own life, which is still under construction, in a world still responding to its Creator's call. Not one single lesson is without its good effect, and even the hardest of our experiences, in the end, will shine with the wisdom of God.

Enter His Courts With Thanksgiving

The ultimate truth about a human life is that it can be a place where humanity meets the divine life of God. That means that all the language about setting out through the desert, soldiering on

through hunger and thirst, longing and yearning, keeping our eyes set on the promises, and at last glimpsing the Holy City, climbing the Temple Mount, entering and seeing the face of God, can be applied to the opening and taking possession of our own life, his most personal gift to us. There are times of darkness and confusion, times when we feel all is lost: loss is one of the necessities for change and growth. With God *nothing shall be lost, and all in the end is harvest.*

The Unjust Steward

In the Gospel parable Jesus gives us the image of a man who has refused the understanding of his heart. By a colossal exercise of mercy, he was spared the consequence of his failings. But that huge act of mercy has passed over the closed recesses of his own heart like a flash of lightning. Instead of changing the course of his life, it has remained external, irrelevant to his real experience. In his dealings with others, he remains the grasping, selfish, and imprisoned person who accrued all those unpayable debts, and who trembled before the power of his master. The divine life can similarly be excluded from any human heart, and then it falls definitively short of true humanity; its final destiny is frustrated, and it is failure, a total loss. God does not wait for us to cleanse ourselves of our weaknesses. He only wants us to accept the strength of his love as our medicine, and be ready receivers of his gifts. Then even our weaknesses become gateways for his grace.

Fr Philip