

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

The Keystone

No-one can live long without experiencing the fear, or even the fact, of rejection. When we are babies our worst fear is that we might be abandoned by our mothers; everyone has heard the sound of a wakened baby move from level murmurs, to insistent calls, to woe, to anger, and then suddenly into a deep wail of abandonment (which is irresistible and utterly authoritative to any parent). All our lives we keep this sensitivity: there are people whose approval and goodwill we find essential, and whose rejection of us we would find hard to endure. Some people have to put up with their wholesale rejection by society: they find themselves disinherited, as vagrants, or prisoners, or refugees - and, in some places, on Death Row (no longer considered fit to live). And that brings us to today's Gospel.

Rejected By The Builders

Rejected people are still human beings, just as the rejected stone is still a stone. The Lord tells us that it is a feature of the plan of God that the keystone of the house should be the *rejected* stone. What is this about? Well, one of the regular features of the Gospel is that the ways God chooses are in heavy contrast to the ways of the world. God could never be confused with the world, because he does not obey its ways. It is almost a sign of divine intervention when what happens breaks the rules we've come to accept, when life comes out of death, when the *rejected* becomes the *chosen*. Why does God choose *in contradiction* to us? Are our choices so infected with sin?

Reading God's Mind...

...is dangerous, unless God has made his mind known to us: but that is, we believe, exactly what he has done; in the Scripture we have tremendous insights into the divine mind, and our religious life must be an attempt to appropriate and deepen our awareness of God's thought, most seriously in relation to our own life. It seems to me that God has made his choice of the rejected stone - Jesus condemned and crucified - precisely to reveal the power of his grace to surpass human negativity, and thus to liberate human hope. The mind of God transcends human limitations so far, that we can come to know its power only *in contrast to our weakness*. So, although God can recruit the powers of Paul to speak with the tongues of men or of angels, to know mysteries and to sacrifice his own body, he also teaches him that it is in his

weakness that he is truly strong. All the saints bear the same witness: they can change history, like Leo and Gregory, but it is not by seeking earthly powers that they become saints. Francis of Assisi continues to turn hearts to God, as a humble man who had put weapons, wealth, and ambitious self-interest behind him. Every martyr foregoes earthly life in the same spirit.

Who Are My Brothers And Sisters?

This has two important consequences: firstly, we can (joyously) revisit our worst apprehensions about our own value. The bits of us that we have written off as worthless are the very things that can make us eternally valuable to God. Secondly, we can also revisit our assessment of other people: the world's most disinherited losers are in fact the prime candidates for the salvation of God. Jesus' choice of companions ought to have alerted us to this already; but we need reminding to lay aside the worldly search for the fashionable, the talented, the patently worthwhile, and to look with the eyes of Christ on the world. The world has never had greater need for the compassion which taught Jesus to read the human face. If we can come to share his reading - against the worldly wisdom which slams so many doors on the disinherited - then maybe we can begin to build the Kingdom of Heaven, in small but significant ways, for the poor, who alone are destined by God to inherit it. *Fr Philip*