

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

You Are My Son, The Beloved

The knowledge that we are loved is the most precious of all gifts. Without it we dwindle, peak, and pine in a comprehensive way, and the space where that knowledge should be remains empty, because nothing else can fill it. When we know ourselves to be loved, the house is brilliantly lit, the rooms are warm, people can come and go, there is a generous welcome and a groaning board. If we are without that knowledge, we are definitively poor. The house is cold and dark, we are unable to enter the best rooms, we are dragging out a miserable half-life in the attic or off the back stairs. The unsheltered can give no shelter, and the unloved can give no love.

Beware Of Imitations

It is because we need love so badly that we are so prone to accepting substitutes when we can't find our way to the real thing. The amazing and awful truth is that these fakes for love are so *poisonous*. You can fake it with jealousy, dependency, greed, obsession, lust, possessiveness, desire to dominate: almost any powerful form of selfishness can dress up as love - so convincingly that even the perpetrators can be deceived. Ignorance, I'm afraid, is no defence for those who are involved; a wolf unrecognised still devours like a wolf. How many people feel savaged and abused in our world! How many feel deceived and betrayed in our own land! There is so much false coin in circulation that we have lost the sense to recognise the true.

Page One of the Good News

The Baptism of the Lord deserves to rank as page one of the Gospel, because it is the first picture of Jesus in the first Gospel (Mark), which we are reading this year. It forms a brilliant frontispiece to what will follow, and all the seeds of the good news are already here; just as the faithful martyrdom of the apostles is "sown" on the day when they *leave everything* to follow Jesus, so the obedience of Jesus will always be to the voice from heaven which today calls him *My Son, the Beloved*. Even as the last jeers and insults fade in his dying ears on the Cross, he will live, *and die*, for the One who calls him today, at his baptism.

My Starting-Point

We aren't particularly fortunate if we can't remember our Baptism. At least we should try to stop saying *I was baptised*, and learn to say *I am*

baptised - the most vital thing that ever happened to me! Because that connection between the Baptism and the death of Jesus is there from the beginning. Paul says: *If we are baptised in Christ, we are baptised into his death*; that is why the image of Baptism should not be sprinkling with water (to wash us) but immersing in water (to drown us) and emerging from water (to raise us from the dead). Jesus inaugurates his life of loving obedience in his passage through the Jordan. Behind the experience lies the terror of the Red Sea crossing, when God slew Pharaoh, the enemy, and raised his people from the waves. The Jordan was the last barrier those people crossed as they entered the promised land; and so Jesus comes up from its waters, and steps ashore *to inherit the promises of God*.

Mark's "Simple" Account

Both Matthew and Luke, when they read our Gospel today, saw problems Mark didn't notice. Mark brings everyone to the riverside to undergo "a baptism for the forgiveness of sins". Jesus too comes, and Mark makes no difference for him. The inference is that he has come to repent as well. The other Gospels safely averted this misunderstanding. What did Mark *want* us to understand? Well, I love to think of Jesus humbly joining this queue *despite not being among those who sin*, because he wants to draw near to, and to be at one with, all who have the grace to repent.
Fr Philip