

Where Do You Live?

There was a wonderful series of adverts last year, designed to recruit people to the teaching profession. Famous people were asked to recall the teacher who had most helped them to develop and grow. We heard about all sorts of marvellous, unsung heroes and heroines, whose memory sprang into full light as soon as these questions were asked. Usually it wasn't some garlanded laureate in the rarefied atmosphere of the Oxford college, but a distracted and overworked primary-school teacher in a rickety classroom. I could reel off my list of them, and I'm sure you could too. Every one of them is now far behind me in time, but fully present to me in spirit.

Letting Go

John the Baptist starts to lose disciples to Jesus in today's Gospel. He teaches us, as it happens, how we should think of this reality. Every parent knows it sooner or later, and every teacher of whatever kind. We all lose disciples, especially if we have been good teachers: it is a sign that we have taught them to be independent, and that we have been generous enough to leave them their lives intact. St Augustine writes most movingly of this as he meditates on the commission of Peter to *Feed my sheep*. "Make sure," he says, "that you do not feed the sheep for yourself; they are *Christ's* sheep, and you must feed them for him. Those who feed the sheep with the intention of appropriating them for them-selves, not for Christ, show that they are guilty of loving themselves, not Christ." So in the Church we must present a model of great purity, making sure that our ministry to one another is truly in the spirit of Jesus, not greedy and possessive. Possessiveness can look like love, but it is the opposite: it desires the beloved, but only so as to devour, that is, to destroy. This cannot be love. However powerfully it may inspire what looks like apostolic labour, it cannot change its spots. Now, despite his patent zeal and fervour, John the Baptist never suffered from this vice. From the outset, he refers to "the one who is coming after me, who is greater than I"; and when Jesus appears, he identifies him at once as the one who will carry the world's sins. In a most moving analogy, he calls himself "the bridegroom's friend", not the bridegroom; and at last he says of Jesus: *He must grow greater. I must grow less*. This is the path he took as his martyrdom became clear to him, and it provided

him with the spiritual map which he needed on that lonely road.

Andrew

Meanwhile, his disciple, Andrew, goes to Jesus and approaches him as a potential recruit (this apparently is how Rabbis accepted pupils). It seems very different from the *call* of the same disciples as described in Mark, Matthew, and Luke. There Jesus bursts into their world with his *Follow me*, and they leave everything to obey him. Here they are already following him, when he turns and says: *What do you want?* They say: *Show us where you live*. And with that, their fate is similarly sealed. They have asked to be shown the way to Jesus' home. That afternoon, he takes them and shows them an earthly house. But that isn't what they were asking for, and Jesus knows that their question will demand a lifetime of following, until they arrive at *the Father's house in which there are many mansions*, which Jesus describes at the Last Supper. There he will say to them: *You know the way to the place where I am going...I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life*. That is what Andrew and his friend were asking to know on this first day of their training. Then, they stayed with him the rest of that day. Now, they will be told: *Make your home in me, as I make mine in you*. The indwelling of Jesus in his disciples leads to the very mystery we are considering: that he lays down his life for them. That is the selfless model for all good teachers to imitate.

Fr Philip