

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Time Is Getting Short

The Gospel we're following this year (According To Mark) is characterised by a sense of urgency which the other Gospels pick up and preserve. We associate this with Mark, perhaps because of his famously "breathless" style of story-telling; his sentences keep starting with "And..." as if his ideas are falling over one another in their haste to reach the airways. Alongside this quality is Mark's supreme sense of the power of Jesus, who exerts a personal authority which is more than natural, and which extends not just over other people, but over the forces of nature which are habitually deaf to human desire.

"No-one else speaks like him!"

This excuse is offered by the Temple Police for their failure to arrest Jesus in the Fourth Gospel, and it is a good example of the consistency uniting all the Gospels. He can speak simply and directly, and people respond in just the same way - however out-rageous his request of them. The urgency of his mission is not communicated by any frantic behaviour, but precisely by the quiet way he lays depths-charges in the lives of those he meets. They may be devastating (take up your Cross and follow me); they may be transfiguring (take up your bed, and walk). But they are never trivial, never cost less than the whole attention and devotion of those who hear them.

The Longing To Repent

One of the keys to religion is undeniably unease - even disgust - with the way our life is going. Something, we come to realise, has got to change; but it is no longer any use tinkering with the details. Something wholesale needs to happen; we've got everything upside-down, and nothing less than a complete change of direction will do. That is the sort of *kairos* or "moment of grace" which is a door through which Jesus can enter. Either you've got that key, I think, or you haven't. If you haven't got it, it's perhaps because of self-satisfaction, the belief that your life just can't reasonably be better than it is. Such a feeling is founded on an untruth so blatant that we ought to be shot for believing it; but then, I think it was A. Hitler who said: *the bigger the lie, the more easily people will believe it.*

Giving Our Mortal Nature Immortal Value

That's a line from one of the Christmas prefaces, and it expresses the reason why self-satisfaction is

poisonous to our faith. However can we reach up for the gift of the Resurrection if we are satisfied with the mortal life we have? Being mortal, it is already a dying thing, it is untrustworthy, it is mined and ticking away. Our desire, our longing, is infinite, and the things we have used to fulfil it woefully short, miserably finite. God has not wanted us to fall short or to be disappointed at the end. So our Christian hallmark is the longing for something more, for what is greater than we can afford to provide; the sort of longing which demands God for its fulfilment.

The Promises Of God

All that transcends our nature and bears witness to God is found in Jesus. To meet him in the flesh seems to have bowled people over and forced them to acknowledge the desire in themselves. Are we all walking about, suppressing inside us the same dynamite charge which turned the fishermen into (unlikely) evangelists and prophets? Would an encounter with this quiet-voiced Rabbi do the same to us as it did to them? *All the signs are that it would.* Is it possible to voyage for a lifetime through our city, and never hear his voice? *I think it must be.* And would it be possible to be a parishioner of our parish, and still somehow fail to come to that encounter? I tremble to say it, but *I think it easily could.* Repent (it says in the Book), change your heart, believe the Good News, the Kingdom is at hand.
Fr Philip