

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Mastering Evil

We don't live our lives in a constant glow of self-satisfaction, because day by day we have evidence of the power of evil over us. This is upsetting, and can, if it gets out of control, rob us of the power to live peaceful and fruitful lives. Because we aren't perfect, the very act of contemplating our lives can bring us pain, and we can start to run away from the truth about ourselves. In this we acknowledge that there are things about ourselves we can't approve of, but which we are powerless to remedy.

Try To Find A Different Way

We don't just meet evil in our own thoughts, words, actions and omissions. We also meet it in others - in their deeds towards us specifically, or just by hearing of other victims. Here is a different encounter with evil, and perhaps here I can have the experience of mastering evil in a way that illuminates the evil I think I *can't* master. On the rare occasion when I find myself exercising real understanding towards someone who has damaged me or hurt me, I choose to turn from a whole cycle of evil (resentment, grudge-bearing, active revenge) and turn instead towards an enlargement of my mind and heart (understanding, sympathy, forgiveness); and this may break the cycle of evil in a way that I *can* rise to, and which teaches me its vulnerability, and encourages me to take a stronger line towards it in myself. After all, isn't this the way God deals with us? He shows us that evil is not invincible by forgiving it, by not cutting us off when we have sinned. In the same way, perhaps the experience of finding forgiveness for someone else may help us to hope for our own forgiveness, and even allow us to accept forgiveness for the worse things we do. To think of *accepting forgiveness* as a victory over evil may seem strange to you at first, but think about it! The real treasure that has been put at risk through sin is the love of God, and our sharing in it. When our sin is forgiven, we are reconciled, and the love of God burns all the more brightly in us for the whole experience. That is defeating evil in the completest way - and it may *only* be possible where God is in the picture, because forgiveness between human beings is so shaky and partial and faulty, and God's forgiveness is like the ocean.

Paralysed....

Now look back at the paralysed man in the Gospel, and the four men who carry him. He cannot shift for himself; he is like us in our inability to cope with our failings. And eight strong arms lift him up, and carry him, and reach the back of a large crowd, and see how impenetrable it is, and are undismayed, and don't give up, but climb up to the roof (where did he think he was being taken?) and let him down through the empty air, to be in front of the Lord he could never have reached by himself. There is the breaking of the circle, the new way in, the determination not to be defeated, and the bearing of another's burden. Jesus is well aware of his coming, and its deepest meaning, and that is why he says the words that hit the exact spot: *My child, your sins are forgiven*. Everything else - even the stunning miracle, that sets him on his feet again - is only a sign of his deep reconciliation to the God who had made him: an assurance that his life was whole again.

I Make A Road In The Wilderness

Can I receive this story as a power to change me - a piece of Good News? I think so. It means acknowledging my paralysis of spirit - my empty, dried-up heart, the frozen state of my limbs - and the faith that others may be carrying me: there are some nearby who love me, and care for me, enough to take my weight, and to look out for me, and to take me to the Lord. *A road is being made for me*. I am being carried to the roof...I am in mid-air...I am lying before him. What does he say?

Fr Philip