

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

A Sad Place

This Sunday's Gospel is a sad story. Powerfully so, in that it isn't a strange story either; the late Bishop of Lancaster, as young curate in Birkenhead, vetoed the youth-club from spending twenty-five pounds for a local group to play at a party, on the grounds that nobody knew if they'd be any good. The group was called The Beatles. In the same way, Jesus of Nazareth has made the name of his hometown known in every place on earth; but he could not find a hearing in its synagogue. What are we to make of this story?

Familiarity Makes Us Deaf And Blind

Mark doesn't punish the Nazareans as hard as Luke does. Luke has them turning murderous, and they hustle Jesus up the hill outside the town to throw him off. Thus the Galileans "pre-enact" the Crucifixion. In Mark, they merely cut off their own noses: *he could work no miracle there...he was amazed at their lack of faith*. How often we see this story acted out! The precious and much-missed son or daughter in Australia, always thought-about and mentioned in conversation, welcomed with the fatted calf: and the ordinary presence of the work-horse who never left home, and who is taken for granted, even freely criticised, ignored from mere familiarity. We have all done it. We listen for the pearls that drop from the great and famous, and ignore the vital, tailor-made message of truth that is delivered across the kitchen table. We inhabit dream-palaces full of unreal splendour, and entirely miss the gold that adorns our actual home. Each year in the Chaplaincy we have a visitor from Hong Kong who lives for the month she spends in Nottingham. I feel sure that we could benefit from finding out what she sees in the place we dare to call humdrum and ordinary. If we think about it, this is a deeply sad way of losing our lives. Perhaps the highly-coloured world of the television may be responsible for emptying out the meaning of what's familiar, and reliable, and real, in favour of what is strange and exciting. Our involvement in fantasy can be dangerously unreal, and by dwelling in it we can lose what we might have inherited, in what is real.

Believe In The Incarnation!

When God became a man, the familiar human world became the theatre of divine life. Moving amongst human situations of fear, joy, grief, pain, love, hate, indifference, and the rest of what

makes up history, Jesus made present the life of God. In this moment, the opportunity was offered to thousands of people to display their response. Like Bishop Brewer and the Beatles, for many of them it simply didn't happen: *can anything good come from Liverpool?* And aren't our fantasies *all* about the way it would be if we had the right opportunity? If I met the right person, if I got the right break, if I chose the right numbers, if so-and-so got off my back: we all think we would shine if the right chance occurred. Cinderella, Aladdin, Jack-and-the-Beanstalk are us. Now think of the people of Nazareth. No doubt they'd heard of the Messiah; they were all in the synagogue, so they must have heard about wisdom, had listened to the stories of the prophets, had recited the psalms. Yet their response, when the great day came, and the incarnate Word stood in their country village, was the real fact of their lives: *indifference*.

Boredom – The Greatest Vice

Medieval theologians said that *accidia*, or sloth, was the most pernicious of the Deadly Sins. It certainly gives everything the flavour of decay; nothing will suffice to rouse us from lethargy; it is despair in a sober suit. We have to break its hold, and find the eyes to see, hear, smell, taste and touch this glittering world, so full of wonder and glory. It is today we must see the coming of Christ, or never. *Fr Philip*