

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

No Spare Tunic

St Paul often had to defend his practice (not always followed) of working for his living whilst he was a missionary. People knew today's Gospel reading, and they thought he was not being faithful to it. Jesus is quite clear that his heralds must live by their message, and be fed and clothed and supported by those to whom he had sent them. Paul seemed to have a belt-and-braces approach, as we say of someone whose talent is questionable: *Don't give up your day job!* If Paul really believed his own message, people reasoned, he would have stopped making tents and devoted himself full-time to the coming kingdom of God.

The Monastic Witness

I am deeply grateful for the witness offered by nuns and monks. In the (necessarily) protected world of the cloister, these people give up possessions, independence, and the right to intimacy with another person, and follow with precious closeness the call of the Gospel. They show to the rest of us that the Gospel's mind is not unrealistic. Parish priests, contrary to many people's expectation, do not take vows of poverty, or chastity, although we do make a promise of celibacy (which means not marrying), and of obedience and respect towards our Bishop and his successors. We are expected, like all Christians, to live decently and simply. Perhaps Paul was already feeling the tension between the life Jesus had enjoined on his disciples in Palestine, and the life he led in Asia Minor and Greece.

The Rural Mission In Palestine

The movement of Jesus in the Holy Land was essentially very small-scale; it was little groups of disciples moving amongst a few local villages, converging at last on Jerusalem. They begged for their food and lodging as they went, and no doubt the tone of their life was very rural and simple. Paul, by comparison, was a whizz-kid. He zoomed around the known world: he died before he could achieve his plan of visiting Spain, and I haven't the slightest doubt that he would eventually have come north to Gaul, even to Britannia (think of it: Paul in Folkestone!) In his time the little movement which had seen its bounds as the borders of Israel became an international mission to the ends of the earth. I wonder how the mind of the apostle would have boggled if he could have heard of the great

Brazilian city of Sao Paolo named after him, or the Cathedral of London?

The Patrimony Of Peter

The fisherman on whose faith Jesus founded his church also travelled west, and settled, we are told, in Rome. I wonder what he made of the memory of this first mission; did he recall the sound of Jesus' voice, saying these words: *No bread, no luggage, no coppers for your purses – and don't take a spare tunic!* I think of these words echoing in Peter's house in Rome, and an old man who had come so far in his service, remembering them and telling his Church about them one Sunday morning. They would have come together through the great streets of the capital of the world, past the fearsome sights of the city. In the stadia and circuses they would have seen the cruelty and prurience of the pagan empire, and of the Roman mob. They would have sensed the military might of the Caesars, and the vast wealth which flowed into Rome from all the known world. That we have this Gospel to listen to today is proof that Peter and his apostolic colleagues reported it faithfully amid all that pagan world, keeping safe the message which he and his eleven friends had once carried out to the villages, now so far away. We should not feel that we are the first to find ourselves far from the birthplace of the Gospel, or the first to be anxious about how to proclaim it to pagans, to foreigners, or to those who seem ill-equipped to understand. It has been this way always, from the very beginning.

Fr Philip