

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

We Know His Father

Joseph is never mentioned by name in Mark's Gospel, neither is Mary in John's – despite her part in the marriage-feast of Cana and at the Cross. The assumption of the crowd Jesus fed that they *know his Father* is one of the ironic turning-points of the Fourth Gospel. They have the name and address of a man in Galilee. But as for their *knowing the Father* (God), the jury is very much out. If they truly *knew* God, Jesus will point out, they would welcome Jesus (the Son whom he has sent into the world). If, on the contrary, they do not accept the Son (Jesus), then how can they claim to know the Father? We have here the makings of a family row. I suspect that Jesus would have been at least tolerated if he had simply claimed to be a rabbi from Galilee with big ideas. What upsets them is his claim to have come down from heaven. This is the one thing Jesus will not leave unsaid about himself: indeed, it is the heart of his message, it is the heart of the Gospel itself.

Disciples Of God

One of the images of true religion in the Old Testament is that of an obedient pupil. The longest of the psalms (119) is a huge litany of 176 verses which all repeat one expression of praise (*I thank you for teaching me*) and a corresponding petition (*Help me to learn my lesson*). If you make the time to read slowly through these verses, you will find an amazing sense of harmony coming to you through them. The expressions change: there are words of fear, sinfulness, failure, peace, bliss, joy, but always in the same mesmeric frame - *you teach me, let me listen*. Even this very basic pattern is taken up by Jesus, and ordered to himself: he says: *It is written, they will all be taught by God. Well, to hear the teaching of the Father, and to learn from it, is to come to me*. Here is the meaning of the Bread of Life: a feeding that is more than earthly food, and which will sustain in us more than earthly life. The first reading tells us: *Eat my bread, drink my wine, leave your folly and you will live: walk in the ways of perception*. You can see that the symbolism of the feeding of the 5,000 is very spiritual, and is about *understanding* the Gospel. But the crowd as a whole does not yet *know* this mystery.

“Come, Children, and Hear Me...

...and I will *teach* you the fear of the Lord.” This beautiful line from today's psalm was written around the sanctuary in St Philip's Mansfield, where I used to say Mass. The graceful lines that precede it say: *Strong lions suffer want and go hungry; but those who seek the Lord lack no blessing*. This is a marvellous foil for the Gospel today. Jesus does not offer an *alternative* way of being fed. We will all need our daily bread. But he asks us to avoid making this – or any other physical need – our motivation, the engine of our lives. Here the psalmist contrasts the suffering of want and hunger (which makes lions what they are) with the seeking of God, the hunger for the Lord: this will mean that *we lack no blessing*, in other words that our lives will be fulfilled.

Only In Heaven

Fulfilment, for a Christian, isn't promised here on earth. Do people sense this fact when they meet us? I'd be very worried if someone met me one day, and said: *I'm not a believer, but I can well see what makes your life worthwhile. You add up perfectly to me, and good luck to you*. If my life makes perfect sense to someone who thinks there is no God, in what way am I an apostle? I'd be rather pleased if such people actually felt sorry for me, thinking that my life must be somewhat impoverished, if not downright sad! After all, if people *do not know the Father*, they shouldn't be able to make sense of his children. We ought to be a bit of a mystery to those who meet us, so that they can sense the presence of God in our lives, even when they don't know him themselves or even believe in him. *Fr Philip*