

Allowing God to change us Reflections on the Kingdom for a New Year

"For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do - this I keep on doing" (St. Paul in Romans 7:19).

When God calls us - how do we react?

As a believer, do you feel a deep consciousness of your own lack of worthiness - a feeling of how unsuited you are, by your very nature, to the work you have felt called to do? Do you ever feel yourself remembering how God called you to belief in Christ and to work on his behalf, and then just as quickly find yourself pondering on the many ways, since you first felt that sense of calling, you have obstructed him - stood in the way of the fulfilment of that calling, with the result that so much of what he wants to do *in* you and *through* you is as yet unaccomplished, half-achieved? We surely all feel this way from time to time. And isn't it therefore incredible that, despite this, God's work is revealed and testified to in each of us who, as believers, call ourselves by Christ's name? And if we cannot account for this by our merits, then we have to recognise that it is because we have been repeatedly accepted through God's grace and his forgiveness of our sins.

And as we currently move through winter into spring, and pass through that period spanning the Old and the New Year, when we habitually examine how we have lived our lives during the past twelve months and resolve to make significant changes in the next twelve, it's good isn't it, to recognise that God *does* bring about such far-reaching and incredible change in our lives. **Indeed, through the work of Christ, God is the supreme change-agent in our world.**

But to allow ourselves to be changed - to become the malleable clay in the hands of the

potter - we need to accept that we must *lose* something in order to *gain* something. *Change, not just in the Christian sense, is synonymous not only with gain, but also with pain.* For God to use us effectively he needs to shape us for the work he has in mind for us, and that means some painful paring away of what we presently are. Refinement always implies sacrifice or loss. When you hear a believer say "But I'm just me," as though that's the way God meant them to be, as a means to excuse their resistance to the need for personal change, then you can be sure s/he has not fully grasped the concept of **continuous renewal** that Christ demands of those who would follow him - growth and regeneration that is continuously being brought about by the work of the Holy Spirit within the believer.

An inner battle

Within each true believer there is always an inner battle going on - always a choice between the pull of our nature - the ways of the world on the one hand and what we know is God's will on the other. Even the apostle Paul referred to this phenomenon when he said **"For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do - this I keep on doing"** (Romans 7:19). And the amazing thing is that despite this strong pull which would drag the believer away from God, **God still succeeds in changing us**, gradually moulding us, little by little, to conform more and more to the image of Christ. We all know the experience of taking two steps forward and then slipping one step back - that is why confession and forgiveness are prominent features of the Christian life and of the liturgy of our services. But to gain kingdom values, to genuinely take them on-board, it is necessary to let go of worldly ones. The two are mutually incompatible. The book of James warns us of the dangers of being **"double-minded"** - trying to embrace kingdom values without relinquishing worldly ones, and it's a danger we are all aware of - the problem lies always in allowing ourselves to relinquish the old life in order to truly embrace the new.

Losing a delusion

But what it is that we must relinquish or lose in this

process of renewal. We must lose a delusion - the delusion is this: that we have power over our lives. We regularly fool ourselves that we have power over important aspects of our lives, but in truth we have no power. As we noted in the last 'Reflections', we have no control, choice or power over who will be our parents, or our siblings. We have no control or power over where we are born or when or how we will die. Only God is truly powerful - we are completely power-less, even for the work that he has called us to do. But when you really think about it, the very reason why God called us in the first place is because, at some stage, we have recognised our powerlessness, and that recognition means that God can then use us to achieve his will. We still manage to make it difficult for him - because he has also given us free wills of our own, the option to make choices - and isn't it just when we fail to recognise our own powerlessness that we make the wrong choices and become obstacles to his will, simply because we are too intent on achieving our own?

A Power struggle

The big problem for us all, is to learn to relinquish our own puny power and trust in God's control over our lives - a process we all find difficult but it's something that must happen if we are to become true and effective instruments in God's hands. It happens slowly, painfully, as daily we face each challenge. Crucially, it must be done **not by us, but in us, by God** and so it can happen only when we, with our free will, allow God to work *within* us by consciously choosing to relinquish our will and trust in God. Each week in church, in our creedal statement, we proclaim our belief not just in God the Father and God the Son but God the Holy Spirit. **That statement implies allowing the Holy Spirit to guide and change us**, and it's important for us to understand that it is

(Continued overleaf (Column 4).....)