

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

## Rest

There's a great obsession with work and activity these days, and it is not at all a good thing if we're taken over by it. People define themselves too easily by the name of their job, whether they see it as gainful employment, or as a vocation, or a bit of both. I think that if you want to see people's nature, the time to visit is not when they are at work, but when they are at rest. You can see how significant this is if you are ever "made redundant" by a firm that has employed you. This is a very devastating happening from a financial point of view, and I would never dream of ignoring that awful fact.

### It Isn't Everything

But if you replace "employ" by "use", you might acknowledge that your boss has hardly been very trustworthy or friendly. You haven't lost a great and vital friendship. He had no further use for you, and he ditched you. That, as they say, is business. But to say: *I am now redundant* is entirely improper. The Lord who created you for his own purposes has not dismissed you, and the place you have been given by God in this world is as sure as that of George Dubya or Bill Gates or the Queen of England. When the word of God commands us to rest once a week from labour, it is telling us to throw off the bridle and bit, to lay down the burdens of office, and, by entering into the experience of rest, to rediscover who we are (as *opposed to* what we do). Who we are is dictated by God, not by any other human being.

### Don't Worry, Be Happy

There's a way of relaxation where you fix your mind exclusively on your toes, and make them relax, and then move up through the rest of your body, commanding each area to be physically relaxed. It's harder than you might think. But you can work the same technique on your emotions. It's quite a good way to start meditating, simply to ask yourself what burdens you're carrying, what pressure you feel, what is niggling or dominating you uncomfortably at this very moment. Usually we can start to unload these things if we try, and one by one consign the littler ones to the WPB. Then we come to the big things, the recurrent worries and fears that make us tired, dispirited, *not ourselves*. These big beasts are hard to face down; but we must try to do it, because whatever stands between us and real peace must be dealt with; God wants us to be at peace. So often it is

our inability to settle these questions that leaves us suspended, paralysed with what we call stress or pressure, unable to be at rest. In this state we must make our prayer a whole-hearted call on God, who has a *place of rest for us*. I think the most positive thing we can do with the great problems and hardships of our lives – the ones that seem just as bad when we have tried everything – is to bring them to God *in their entirety*, to make him truly *Lord of all*. This gives us some integrity where we feel we're falling apart, and opens to us the possibility of peace. I suppose the trapped climber on the crag is still pretty anxious when the helicopter arrives: but the anxiety of someone who is radically helpless *and alone* differs from that of someone who is helpless and surrounded by help, as death differs from life. When we are filled with the sense of disease, we are in a condition of distress. When we are undergoing treatment, we are filled with an active hope and trust.

### Martha, Martha!

He says it twice, calling her back to herself. I sometimes wonder if Mary was habitually a lazy personage, and this made her sister habitually work all the harder to shame her into lending a hand. If so, maybe Martha was the founder, and first victim, of the Protestant Work Ethic. Mary can be seen as the Membership Secretary of the Society for the Promotion of the Cocktail Hour. Let's admit that, if we want dinner *and* good company, we need both of them, and if possible they should be good friends as well as sisters. So there are seven days in the week: but the one that we call the Lord's Day should be the one that reminds us that work plays second fiddle to rest, and that if we ever forget what rest is for, no amount of work will make up for it. Why do we toil so hard, and exhaust our selves, if the net result is that we lose our capacity to be who we are? The moral is: Call yourself (twice) by name, put aside the work, and sit down, and pour out a gin and tonic, and let the Lord delight in his people.

*Fr Philip*