

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Making Sense Of The World

What learning, and education, and thinking try to do is to make sense out of the world. I find it's always moving and exciting to watch a baby beginning to do this. The movements seem clumsy, the eyes faintly drunk, the balance unreliable. Yet behind the big, bland face of a baby the wheels are revolving at a speed never equalled later, as data are processed within. I feel sure babies are seeing in a way adults no longer can. We always assume we know what we're looking at, but for babies even the humblest view is packed with interest, as when they miss the point at their first birthdays, throwing the costly presents away and having a lovely exciting game with the giftwrap and the ribbon.

Pray To Make Sense

We can be helped in many ways to make sense, and many people help us: in dialogue, in explanation, but also in sharing experiences, sometimes wordlessly, we help one another into life that is deep in meaning. Prayer lets God be such a guide, and it can be the short way. "*Awe before God is the beginning of wisdom,*" says the Psalmist, "*all who have it prove themselves wise.*" In the Scripture this Sunday we find Abraham – full of awe in God's presence – feeling his way towards understanding God's will, the hidden template behind all of human history, including mine and yours. People who don't know God can hardly grasp the vital difference between inner life as they live it, and the life of prayer. All human beings have an interior life. It can be the final heart of darkness, the ultimately lonely place. We can have a heart inhabited by demons, a well of selfishness, or fear, or ingrained despair. People who are like this may carry on a long struggle to absorb and circumvent the forces that inhabit their hearts. Some of the noblest lives are engaged in that heroic task. Also there are many who, by counselling and healing those who suffer in this way, act as midwives to the rebirth of human spirits. But the welcoming of the Holy Spirit, a conscious acceptance of divine love, would be the short way. I remember the people who said to Paul in the Acts of the Apostles, "*No-one has mentioned the existence of a Holy Spirit.*" Rather than lonely people trying to scratch purpose and meaning from the hard rock of our experience, we are actually living in dialogue with our Maker, who already has the meaning and purpose of our lives in his mind. *That changes everything.*

Instead of struggling to create ourselves, we find our being already has its intention in the mind of God. This isn't at all the same as finding that we are decreed only by "fate" (as most people, in fact, believe). This is the sort of belief which used to characterise pagans. Being the result of mere chance, pagans could behave in whatever way they could get away with. But if our lives are brought into being by a gracious act of God, we live in his presence, in relation to his plan. Now, this is a disconcerting discovery, and might be undignified, if God had not shown us that he wants to share the working out of this plan with us. We are nearest to the truth if we look at it with God, and share ourselves with him. *Ask, you will receive; seek, you will find; knock, the door will be opened.* There is a meaning, and if we seek it, we will not be disappointed. This surely gives us a new context for prayer. It is not a sort of "cupboard love", cadging favours from an indulgent parent. It is a coming into the presence of the Author of our whole story, to seek our share in his understanding, which has determined our being and the course of our life, and will fix our terminus. This is the short way to the utter truth, whose possession will bring us peace. The longest Psalm in the Bible, Ps 118/119, is a long meditation on this fact alone, and I reckon it would be worth opening it up, and letting its seemingly eternal refrain bring quiet to our searching hearts. *Fr Philip*