

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Join The Holy Family

Today the Bishops' Conference has asked us to think about the gift of life, because the fact that it *is* a gift seems to have been rather comprehensively forgotten.

The Sadness of the Self-Made

The gift of life is not designed to be thrown about randomly, but to be bestowed within a relationship which has the power to be our most precious experience. If this loving relationship is present, the giving of the gift of life becomes a pinnacle of human experience for parents and child. You can look at it differently, of course; you can talk about "falling pregnant" or about "getting caught", as if married love were a brand of tightrope-walking or gun-running; there are all sorts of ways in which the ordinary figures of speech we use can unconsciously degrade the highest things we know.

It Doesn't Have To Be Like That!

But parents also know the miraculous way in which the actual arrival of a child can reduce them to a condition of near-worship. Surely this is far more of an entrance into the mystery of being human than the present preoccupations of the chattering classes: all that harsh rhetoric about independent rights, self-determination, and power over our own lives, which forgets mystery and gift, and reduces human life to a possession. There is something very sad about the self-made. They think of their lives as a fight for survival, and they tend to be most careful of their rights over themselves. But what right did I have to come into the world? What right did I exercise in order to receive my gifts and my disabilities? I didn't make this face! My only excuse for being here is that I *didn't* choose to come. Someone else made that choice: and it wasn't my parents, either. Whatever you choose to believe in as the cause of each life – and I have long ago opted to believe in a conscious decision on the part of a very powerful Being – will have great impact on what you think of your life and its value. It will also have great importance in the way you think about the lives of others. If all we know has come to us as a *gift*, then simply living and breathing puts me in relationship with the Giver of the gift. I live to God, who gave me life for his own purpose. I'm not going to be defined, "put in my place", by anyone else. No-one has the right to question the

awesome decision of God, that I should be in his Creation

Children: Who Needs Them?

The notion that sex is there simply to get people together has always lurked around us, and it has given us some of our worst ideas and worst stories. Promiscuity, lust, and selfishness can all be dressed in the vocabulary of love. They all end in tears, and they all have in common a deep hatred of life. Life is to be *shared*, it is not to be *kept* in a miserly fashion; to inherit the beauty of our lives means learning generosity, and entering onto the long path of purification, where we refuse selfish motives and exalt generous ones.

The Dignity Of Our Power To Promise

Only in a life secured by promises is this possible. God has not only *spoken* his promises to us: he has embedded them in our being, in *our* power to make promises and keep them, in our longing for security, in our willingness to lay down our life for each other. Nowhere is this more regularly true than in the sacrament of parenthood, which makes human beings so like God towards their children. As he creates and faithfully redeems, so good parents give life, and stay faithful to their gift. Surely there we can learn the way in which God teaches us what he is like.

Adam And Eve

Let's not allow ourselves to be seduced by the latest message from the ancient serpent. In the Garden, the serpent taught the woman how to think for herself, how to ask what was beautiful, and nourishing, and creative; her temptation isolated her in a very modern way, and the very last ingredient in her thought was the promise of God. She saw, and judged, and chose, not by any divine standard, but by her own. She forgot *she* was herself a gift, that she had been made by God to be a gift. In that moment we first lost the meaning of our lives. The road of our loss has been a long one, deprived of our meaning. We are *four thousand winters long* in learning it again.
Fr Philip