

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

## Watch For Her Early

Miraculously, after a shaky start, I've come to enjoy early mornings. Never having been pregnant, I don't know what mornings are like in that glad state; but I well remember feeling pretty sick nearly every morning of "the happiest days of my life". I found this misfortune lifted shortly after going to University, when I found I could choose when to wake and when to sleep – a luxurious arrangement I've never forgotten, thirty-three years after it ceased to prevail. The Seminary reminded me what it is like to be enslaved to the clock, and living in parishes is inimical to "lying in". These days I have to be on the University Campus by 8 am, otherwise I can't park my car, and have to come home. Nevertheless, there's a strange leisurely feel about being up and about betimes, mixed with a residual sort of righteousness. If the sun is shining into the bargain, it is truly the best of the day.

### Morning Prayer

The Church has always prayed in the morning, because it's what Jesus did. The wisdom of the monastery decrees an early rise, and the precedence of prayer over all else. This "firstness" is very conspicuous. Without wishing to make any personal inference about any one of them, I strongly suspect that 6 am monks at Ampleforth have very little time between bed and choir-stall. This is a very sincere obedience to the injunction of the book of Wisdom: *watch for her early* means *first thing* for them. An abbey church is a sort of timepiece. By the state of the darkness or light in it at 6 am you can tell the time of the year; as the silence falls, you can feel that you have found your place in reality, in true time, that you are where you ought to be, and that because of this you can meet God. Prayer reaches out to seize *this moment*, and to fill it with the deepest meaning we know. Thus the feeling of expectancy in the Wisdom reading today. I think that the theme of the parable of the bridesmaids can apply to the same area. It's hard for us sometimes to get into the spirit of prayer: but that is because we don't expect the encounter, the wonder, that prayer can be. *Waking up when the bridegroom comes* is a good way to think about prayer (and, incidentally, about the morning). Of course, we live in a time when few people seem to understand what a wedding is, or what precise wonder and excitement a wedding can inspire.

### In The Beginning

Getting started is very demanding, in any project. *Where do I start?* can be a paralysing frame of mind if we don't answer. In relationships, there are so many times when something huge needs to be said, but because we don't know how to begin, it never *gets* said. Such a silence, making us unable to speak the word of life, isn't prayerful or meditative, but sick. If we keep this silence, the relationship will wither and die. So with prayer. I'm sure most people would love to pray, and that they don't have the faintest idea how to begin. They feel self-conscious and strange, at odds with the neighbours, out of step with the spirit of the age. A good way to prevent prayer is to turn on Breakfast Television as soon as you hit the vertical in the morning. It seems so authoritative, whether it gives you sober coverage of the BBC news, or the manic forced hilarity of the less weighty channels. At any rate, the silent waiting for wisdom is not going to happen in that twittering world; and is anything else? It often seems that broadcast media is a substitute realism, a dummy to comfort our longing for contact, for relationship, for truth itself. So, perhaps, do the foolish bridesmaids sleep, never thinking of the call that will come, to waken for the wedding-feast; and how modern the story seems to be, when we realise that, at the apocalyptic moment when God summons his people to the consummation of all his promises, the foolish bridesmaids are....*shopping!* Well, I make not the slightest claim for my own state of readiness; and maybe the "wise" girls in our Lord's story are not really a quantum-leap ahead of their colleagues. But perhaps in our coming to listen for Wisdom today, God may find us at least aware of our need, perhaps even ready to be led. Maybe there will be enough oil in our lamp to receive the light of the world, and to raise more than a flicker of response. If so, maybe our dull soul can be roused to something more than routine, and open its eyes to the nuptial joy which awaits us in the eternal heart of God. *Fr Philip*