

From The Beginning

John's Gospel starts with the same words as the Book of Genesis: *In the beginning....* This is no coincidence, but the intentional evoking of the infinite space of God's life. This space is alive with meaning, with the whole significance of God; unlike us, God does not need to find meaning for himself through experience, or through relationship with others, or through achievements; the divine life is in no need of justification or of "finding a situation". And this is expressed by John's resounding first statement: *In the beginning, was the Word.* How is this so?

Words And Definitions

Every word I use needs *defining*. Definition is a negative proceeding: it means setting the *boundaries* of a word's meaning: what does *red* mean? If I say it's a colour at the end of the spectrum next to orange and opposite violet, will that do for you? Or do you want to know that it's the colour of blood, or fire, or rubies? Or do you need to know that blood is what makes you blush, or that there is a thing called wine that is often red, or that a fire engine is even redder than fire, or that red is for danger; how long must I go on before I've defined *red*? When you know *red* you might define it by drawing the boundaries of green or blue; and in the end you'll know the boundaries, and say *I know the word.*

God's Word Is Undefinable

But the single Word of God is quite unlike that. It is a word which has no *definition*, because it is *infinite*, *it has no boundaries*. Everything that exists is in it, not beyond it; or as John says, *Through the Word all things came into being: nothing came into being except through the Word.* This Word, then, somehow contains and surpasses all that has come to be, all that exists: it is God's Word for understanding everything, and therefore it isn't listed in our dictionary amongst words that can be defined; it isn't one of them. God's Word, that was in the beginning, was with God, and was God, because before any Creation took place, God fully knew and understood himself, and all that he could ever choose, by this single Word. We can't understand either God, or even that lesser thing, his Creation, until we share in this Word. What God has done to make this

possible is to send his Word to become flesh, to become what we are, so that we can actually see his glory as the only-begotten Son of the Father.

Andrew And Peter

Today's Gospel, describing two who meet Jesus, shows us the impact he has upon us. It would not do, John thinks, to say anything mysterious or secretive about him. *In him was light, that was the light of men;* and these two men are sure that they are filled with light when they meet him. Andrew says firmly: *We have found the Messiah* (that took Matthew's Peter sixteen chapters to say). Here Andrew knows it on the first day: or, we might say, *from the beginning*. The guide through this maze is that we have our own place in the Word: we too were found *included in the Word* when we are created; you might momentarily think of the single Word as a great limitless catalogue, a pattern-book in which God muses about his Creation. Yet it is alive and unrestricted, itself endlessly creative; not only our past and our present can be found there, but our unknowable future too. This living Word is the one Peter and Andrew met beside the Jordan. *We saw his glory.*

He Bridges The Gulf

Jesus is beyond us, infinitely greater, by his divinity; but he is also thoroughly with us in his humanity. Not only that, but he is our kin because the Father "chose us in him". However wounded or diminished our humanity becomes, in him we see its foundation-place, and know we are children of the promise. That is why he merits our trust as his disciples. *Fr Philip*