

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

## By The Love You Have

There are three powers of the human spirit that lead us directly towards God. They are called “theological virtues” - faith, hope, and love. People probably doubt whether they have these virtues. But I think they are there.

### **I Wish I Had Your Faith**

People often say this, sounding wistful, as if faith were something that specially gifted people are born with, like long eyelashes or brown eyes. Real believers should snort at this. There’s no lottery that leads to faith, and everyone has it - in something or someone. It might be only yourself that you trust: but you have faith in some reality that will make sense of your life and reward you for its hardships, make good your expenses, cause the sun to shine on you at last. Why, if you didn’t believe that, would you bother to get up in the morning, or comb your hair? There is always something we treasure, for which we will be prepared to suffer and sacrifice. Those who claim to have no faith are simply not bothering to spell it out or give it a title. Maybe it wouldn’t bear the light of day if they did (some people live for surprisingly small causes, like a darts league or an allotment).

### **Hope For The Best**

That’s a common phrase which holds a world of religion hidden in it. St Anselm would have said it with joy, believing as he did that “God is the greatest that can be thought”. “Hoping for the best” doesn’t name God specifically, but if God is the greatest he is also the best, and we all hope for him even if we don’t know how to name him. We hope for him most clearly if we pray, which is the holding of your life up to him, and waiting for him to meet you and listen to you. When we pray we open up all our hopes to God, and he looks at them with us. Perhaps some of them seem too low and small for us, perhaps they would not help us to grow if they were fulfilled. God would rather our desire deepened and broadened into something more serious. Then our *unfulfilled* desire is the fastest way for us to grow, and if we are humble and accept his will, our desire will take on a new scale and realism. One day we shall be graced with the pure desire for God *and nothing else*. That is the sort of love for which marriage can prepare us. The experience of knowing that one other person has become irreplaceable to us, that no-one else will

do...this is a real trace of the divine in our nature; but getting married to the right person is not the terminus of hope, only a stage on the way. What a host of different hopes we pass through, in the making and upbringing of a family! But the way in which these successive hopes prepare us for a single, final hope for the Father’s house is a great and holy mystery.

### **The Glory Of God**

God’s glory is his real Presence shining in the world; and St John tells us plainly, *God is love*. Love is born in us like a marvellous flowering of the personality, which is suddenly thrown into a totally generous mode. How is it that another person can so unexpectedly reveal to us - with no words spoken - what we are for, what we mean? A life without love is clenched, closed, and bleak: everything is burdensome and too much trouble. Love can suddenly unite the personality, giving purpose and direction to everything we are. It’s the comprehensive integrity it bestows which makes us say, like the beloved disciple in the boat, *It is the Lord*. Of course, if you don’t know what or whom you believe in, and you haven’t thought out what it is that you hope for, it must come as a huge and puzzling surprise when The Force is suddenly with you. Then, you probably can’t say *It is the Lord*: but it still is! The transfiguring of the personality comes just the same: the creed may be silent, but the virtue is the same thing.

### **Why We Must Proclaim Christ**

The reason why we need to make the risen Lord known is precisely in order to call by their proper names the virtues which can lead us, and others, towards God. I won’t accept it when people deny that they have faith. They just don’t know what to call it. They are so often loyal, self-sacrificing, truthful, fair, just, kind, and decent. Why? Because it makes them feel good? Is it a form of selfishness? Not in this world. They are like that because they have faith in those values and in the possibility of keeping them sacred. Everyone who breathes has some kind of hope, even if they never define it clearly. But the gift which displays the risen Christ most clearly is the resurgent power of love, “by which everyone will know that we are his disciples”.  
*Fr Philip*