

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

What Is Your God Like?

In any relationship, we benefit not only from the time we spend together, but from the time we spend apart. To live always “in one another’s pockets” isn’t, in my experience, the best idea. Children in school holidays, or newly-retired husbands, soon feel that they had better tread carefully around the house! When we leave for a little while, there is a tenderness about parting, and it is nearly always followed by a time of meditation about the relationship, in which concerns and comments can often crystallize. Then comes the return, when we dramatise our first meeting, with welcome, and gratitude, and greeting.

We’re Not Pure Spirits

We aren’t angels, but animals. Our lives don’t burn like Bunsen burners, with an unwavering constant flame. They flicker, waver, and blaze alternately. We are part of that created world where there is dawn and sunset, springtime and fall. The Church’s habit of prayer is fully observant of this. Early in the morning there is Matins, and Lauds; at midday there is the short office; in the evening Vespers, and at the last, Compline. I think that our personal life of prayer also has its ebb and flow. The moment of leaving the presence of God has its power to make us reflect; and our return to it has about it a sense of homecoming, which puts all that we have been doing into perspective. Even when we can’t pray, our lives are carried in this stream of prayer, and we say, *from the rising of the sun to its setting, praised be your name.*

Not Like A Sofa

God’s consolation at the end of the day is not a pair of slippers and a sofa and a drink. To meet God will always be a live encounter with what is greater than we are, what is beyond our scale. Perhaps we could compare it with the miner’s first breath of fresh air after a long shift at the coalface, or the submariner’s liberation from a month in a narrow coffin beneath the waves. Abraham looked up in the evening, and saw the first sight of the uncountable stars. Suddenly he was aware of the multitudinous grains of sand beneath his feet. So for us as we enter God’s presence, the sky lifts and opens, the earth quietly responds to its Maker. We say *O Lord, you*

search me and you know me. You discern my purpose from afar.

Not Like A Policeman

God is utter holiness, and his calling of us, at our beginning, is already a call to be holy as he is. Thus our coming to prayer is always accompanied by an awareness, often very painful, of our poverty before him. But it isn’t the cowering guilt of a detected criminal. We never *surprise* God with our failings. He knew them all when he made us, and their unfolding neither dismays nor disappoints him. On the other hand, they can speak to us of his kindness towards us, whereby he still wanted to make us despite all our weakness. Nothing we do can earn his favour. Nothing we do can destroy it. When we say *We sinned, and lost your friendship*, the loss is all ours, not God’s. We should never think our wrongdoing can change the disposition of so great a God.

Not Like A Government Body

One of the sadnesses of living in a country with 60 million people is that we come to believe we’re insignificant, except to the close circle of our family and friends. When it comes to belonging to the human family, this massive community covering the face of the earth and aeons of years, our mind boggles. The nearest thing we can think of to represent multitudes is a government; and we know that humanity doesn’t stretch to such extensions. Government is bureaucracy, the failed appeal, the unanswered telephone, the total death of any imagination or sympathy: what is big is impersonal, and we are no longer interested. God is not that. God is not a super-aware human. He transcends what we are totally. He relates to us by other means than ours. We can say of him *He drills the stars like an army, calling each one by its name: not one fails to answer.*

Maker, Father, Redeemer

Our Creator loves all that he has made and intends to sustain it. He adopts us as his sons and daughters. He will move the heavens and the earth to save us from the power of evil. In all of these qualities we find cause to seek him, to listen to him, and to wait for him with trembling, but also with a trustful love which forms his likeness in us. *Fr Philip*