

Girl Power

In English we are quite unlike all the other languages I know, in reserving gender to animate objects like people and other animals. Other languages have genders for most things. They aren't consistent. French tables, for instance, are feminine, whilst German tables are blokes. (It must have been dreadful to live in Alsace-Lorraine, finding your furniture changing sex every time there was a war.)

Wisdom Is Bright

- and she's a bright young *lady* - in Hebrew (*hkm*) and also in Greek (*Sophia*). But there's little about her that's shy or retiring. She's an early instance of girl-power. Look at today's first reading, and you'll see what I mean. If you think about it, she's pretty clear about what she wants and whom she wants; and the more you read about her in the Bible, the more forthright and clear-thinking she appears. She doesn't suffer fools gladly, and if she runs across one, she tells him where he's going wrong, and puts him right. She's also bright in the social sense, never more in her element than when she's setting the table and inviting people to sit, eat, drink to their heart's content. That they're willing to sit down is a sign of hope. The psalm today says, *My soul shall be filled as with a banquet*. She's more than just a party-girl, but she's all of that: some of the passages hint that those who drink deep at her parties find themselves wanting more and more, until they can't happily go back to the world outside.

You Could Fall For God

I feel sure that our choice of imagery for God hasn't been wide enough. We've got the point about God's authority, which awes us, and his power, which terrifies us, and his independence, which mystifies us. But that could be Idi Amin or Polyphemus, rather than God. We're less good at God's sense of humour, his enjoyment of being God, his generosity, and his overwhelming love for what we're *going* to be. This futuristic dimension may be part of the problem. When some human being loves *what we shall some day be* we usually assume they're after our

money, or that they want to take us over for some reasons of their own. Now God doesn't have to take us over (already owns us) and he has no purposes of his own (already is, and has, the best, and can't be robbed or changed). But he does like to see us blessed with a gift we can't earn: sharing his eternal joy. Getting us to choose this, without forcing or overpowering us, is his whole aim in setting up this mysterious universe. I sense this is the reason we suffer so much, although I still haven't quite worked that bit out (We certainly don't suffer to make God happy, so it's got to be something to do with us).

Wisdom Comes To Meet Us

God doesn't plan that in becoming divine we should leave behind our humanity, as if he said: *Be good, and I'll save you from being human*). When we share divine life we'll still be human too: we shall be in an eternal state of threshold, with the everlasting sense of access, of wonderment, at being thrilled to the core by an unexpected, but overwhelming piece of good news; because we'll never get used to being loved by God, and we'll never get over it, and it will always be as if we'd only just realised what it means, because eternity won't rob us of that first ecstatic explosion of understanding. Wisdom comes towards us in our humanity: she puts out her arms to us, and smiles at us, and offers us a human welcome, and we begin to get a frisson of something wonderful that is opening up for us. That attraction of holiness you can sense in some of the saints, and sometimes it comes in praying, though not often: and sometimes you get a glimpse of it in the liturgy, or in a sudden sight of a face in a crowd, or a whiff of scent in a garden, or a cast of light in the afternoon, or a note of music that gets under your armour, or the swerve of your own heart when the beauty of this moment flies open like a star-shell, and you glimpse an epiphany. Wisdom is a lovely young lady, a mind like a vice, tons of nous, and a heart of gold. What she eventually does is to lead you to meet up with the Word: and the Word is greater than Wisdom: because the

Word is with God, and the Word is God; but
that's for later!

Fr Philip