

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

## I Want You To Be Happy!

How many of us are there, who would not say that to all his or her family and friends! And yet the story is that our presence can provoke pain, hurt, anger and misunderstanding, rejection and feud, even among the dearest of them. How do we end so badly, having sincerely wanted to do well?

### What The Bishop Said

Perhaps I could remind you of something the Bishop wrote to us in his Pastoral Letter on the first Sunday of Advent: if we pray over things, letting our lives unfold under the gaze of God, he will always help us to see things in a new way. So my first advice to unhappy people is: *try to find a new way to pray*. If you badly mess up your life, and you begin to waver in your intentions, and ask: *is my life worth living?* - you will *know* that you need to see things in a different way. The pity is, that we seldom find the grace to change so fruitfully, unless we have practically stared into our own graves. Perhaps our Father does sometimes allow us to be scared by our lives, so as to make us serious searchers, ready to reconsider and be healed.

### What It's Like To Be Happy

I don't think you need to be leaping up and down scattering flowers out of your hat before concluding that you're happy. I think happiness shows itself, however, in certain recognisable ways: happy people are *flexible* about others, ready to welcome and to yield them space. Happy people have the *extra* that's needed for forgiveness, for sympathy, for generosity. A really happy person knows how to *spread* confidence, to praise others, to appreciate whatever's good; happy people become a fountain of life for others. Happy people greet bad news with courage and practicality, because they trust things to be solvable and finally happy. Happiness, in other words, is as much about the way you look to the future as about the way you live today. Time past and time future can both be lethal to happiness in their different ways; to be crippled with shame and regret about the past, to be filled with despair about the future - both conditions can ruin the experience of the brightest day. We need something more, therefore, than a few good happenings laid end to end: we need faith, and its little sister, hope; and these are basic attitudes that have to be taken up and reinforced day by day,

even sometimes hour by hour. That takes an effort and a resolve which requires solid funding from outside. Some of us have sound physical constitutions which carry us through; some of us have successful careers which keep our confidence reinforced; but neither of those things can be relied on to last a lifetime, and sooner or later we shall need to come to terms with their loss. That's why our faith needs founding on something that lasts beyond our resources.

### Just Imagine

Suppose for one minute that our longing for stability, permanence and trustworthiness is something more than wishful thinking. Suppose it is written into our nature, by whatever force put us together, that we should search and find what we need to be stable, happy, and trustful people. Imagine the cause we would need for such confidence: benevolent, communicative, eternal, strong beyond our idea of strength, wise, faithful, and equal for all...if there were no God, then we should have to settle for the chaotic, dark, unreasoning world where physical necessity and subhuman instincts would rule our lives. Happiness then would be as random, and about as rare, as lottery wins.

### Only Believe

But hist! Unlike poor old Voltaire, we don't have to invent God, necessary as He is. We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and of earth, of all things visible and invisible. The only thing we have to invent is our own act of faith; and we do that not by making a speech about it, but in the hidden room of our heart, when we gratefully lean on God with total trust and in complete peace. One minute of that total surrender would feed the whole day for us. Prayer should not be our second nature: it should be built into our being, as necessary as eating or breathing. It can only be this if we are faithful to it, asking nothing of it, giving time to it, making a space for God alone, to use as he will. Asking nothing makes sure that it is a real sacrifice, a pure gift of self to the Father. It takes training to do this, the way a mother or father being faithful to a new baby needs training. But it is just as vital as caring for a baby; it is the real care of ourselves. We need God the Father, to give us life.

*Fr Philip*