

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Second Communion Day

Today is First Communion Day, and those of us who attend the 10 am Mass will have the joy of seeing the coming to the Sacrament of Love of a lovely group of youngsters, who have been preparing industriously for this day with their generous teachers. I'm sure it will be a great ceremony. But when will it be Second Communion Day? Very soon, if what it means has really entered their minds and (because they are still very young) the minds of those who are their first teachers in the ways of faith: Mum and Dad. So I'm writing the Bulletin today for mums and dads as well as for our children.

How Can We Love Them Best?

So many ways our children need love, and so many ways they deserve to be loved, and make it easy for us to love them. (Some ways they make us want to send them back to be modified - but that's something we live with!) There's a kind of logic which puts adults in the driving seat for children. We have to look ahead, foresee all dangers, difficulties, and problems, and guide the family through to safety. This does two things: it makes adults think they always have to be right, which drives their children mad: and it makes life, and especially parenthood, a tremendous strain. We *can't* always be right, as we can't be perfect. Sometimes, out of anxiety and care, we make timid and fearful decisions which close down the risk and the joy of life. Sometimes we fail to spot the real danger and lead people right into it through short-sightedness. We have blind-spots, which make us unable to see one another correctly, and we seem insensitive or cruel. We're sometimes just very poor in this or that virtue, and can't give what it takes.

The Love Of God

I shall not be with you much longer. I give you a new commandment: love one another as I have loved you. When Jesus says these words, he hands over to us the task of loving one another well; and at the same time he gives himself to us as our model. We will love one another well, if we love one another as Jesus loved us. *This* is why we read the Gospel so carefully, learning the Way Jesus teaches, the way to love properly. And it isn't an abstract matter of rules and regulations, but a living experience. We are caught up into his story, through the Holy Spirit who lives in

us and reminds us of all that he said and did in our midst, and helps us to receive and keep safe all his gifts to us. The Holy Spirit makes him real to us, and we can pray and be taught in the depths of our hearts, the very place where our love for each other springs from. Then we will be in no danger of being dominated by fear, or meanness, or any of the other enemies of love which spoil our relationships and lead us wrong.

Our Communion

When we gather round the table at home, and parents break bread for their children, they remind them where they came from, and who cares for them the most, and to whom they belong. Deep inside the children the answering love stirs, and the trust deepens, and everyone grows. When we come to Mass, and break bread with Jesus, we all come together to the fountainhead of love, "through whom we all came into being"; this is love properly so called; and for the gaze of Christ to rest on us is just the same as the way the gaze of our parents rests on us at the family table. Deep within us, the response stirs, and trust deepens, and we grow into the divine life with which God is feeding us.

Sheer Plod

I am sure that the family table often doesn't shine with the grace and beauty it deserves. There are snatched meals between the fridge and the back door, there are shifts, there are absences, there are days when everyone feels dull, or even tearful. The Mass is the same. It can't always be the shimmering glory of a perfect liturgy, in whose far depths shines the majesty of God. We mustn't make the perfect the enemy of the good. But the Mass must be as ordinary and essential a part of life as cold water. Otherwise we make a mockery of it. If we don't make it the one thing we always do, it loses its place in our hearts. And a religion that isn't first in the heart is no religion, but a disgraceful charade, an insult to God and a shaming of those who dare to pretend. Whatever we give to our young people, let us give them truth in the heart, a sacred space that is visited and known, a true home for all that is loveliest and best in their lives. That will be the richest inheritance they could hope for; and it is the gift of Jesus to his Church, which we hand on today to a new generation. *Fr Philip*