

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Think Heaven!

When we are comfortably alone in the privacy of our inner self - say, in the period, increasingly short for me, between turning off the light and falling asleep - we may think that what goes on is pretty trivial. The day's business is over, there is no-one left to talk to, we are on our own. For me, this has always been the guaranteed time for prayer; even if the day has been so frantic that there's been no space for tranquillity, reflection, or communion, I know there will be a few minutes at the end of the day.

Prepare to meet thy dreams

Soon I will be in the territory of sleep, where I shall leave the narrow corridors of the waking life, and swim, float, or soar into the empyrean world of dreams. There, the brakes will be off, and I shall look on what I can't bear to look on awake: I shall visit, and be visited by, people I cannot meet awake. I shall experience things I try not to imagine in the bright light of day; and neither my good manners, nor my careful training, nor my common-sense, nor the limits of gravity, space or time will stand in my way. Dreams come amoral, and I'm quite sure that wise men and women could tell more about us from our dreams than from our waking discourse. This is solemn stuff: but it's true that we live, even the most balanced and sober of us, on the brink of a chasm, beneath a limitless heaven; we've evolved ceilings and safety-rails for the day, but in the night the truth returns like a tide.

Night Prayer

The little liturgy of Compline - the word is from the Latin for "rounding off" - is our last word before this great transition. I sometimes wonder if we're not optimistic in assuming the good shape we've made of our day. Maybe we've consigned to the darkness things we should have dragged into the light, and maybe the voyage into the infinite that is sleep has ways of "rounding off" what we have made so incomplete, so impoverished a life. I think it would be worth modifying our night prayers in this direction. There is something humbling about lying down to sleep: a resignation, a surrender; there is also the modelling of our death, because we have reached the boundary of our power to work and stay awake. However influential we are, we acknowledge our limitations like any

helpless baby as we fall to sleep. I think there is great virtue in this necessity, and we should try to mould our thinking in this direction. If we don't, the result is simple and just: insomnia. We can only sleep soundly if we let go of the waking life, and if we have that trust which doesn't cling to power.

A deep and dazzling darkness

The fact that our sleep is so full an experience, so rich an encounter with our life, can help us not to resist the process of surrender. God never lets go of us; but he holds us most securely when we let go of ourselves in trust. When we stop providing for ourselves, God is ready with his eternal love. There is something of this in today's Gospel. The Sadducees don't believe in life after death; I wonder if they believed in life after sleep. They are busy imposing the categories of this short and narrow life on the destiny of the world. They can only think of reality as being the one they now experience. Since they cannot imagine any heaven that doesn't have public lavatories, an Internet, and a big Tesco, they find themselves unable to step off the brink of their business, and be spoken to by a God who transcends them so totally. Jesus is firm with them, speaking from a transcendent knowledge of the Father.

Our Love For Each Other

In that transfigured world where we shall look on God, the greatest of all change for us will be in our knowledge of each other. In this life, we come to love those in whom we glimpse God's image. Then we shall see one another as he does, and love them all as he does. This immense and utterly joyous change will wash from us in the twinkling of an eye all misunderstanding, all distaste, all sense of preference: to be replaced not by indifference, but by the same divine appreciation which would have brought the Son of God to earth if only the meanest of us had been left to save. To share God's joy in his creation, in his *people*, is what we must most hope for when our life is freed from this world's limits. If we can make our prayer before sleeping a prayer for that to happen, we shall perfectly match the daily laying-down of life to the hope which shines on us so brightly, if only we can let it. To God, all of us are alive. May he grant us to see one another, and share his joy. *Fr Philip*