

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

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## Call No-one On Earth Your Father

Why do we think of translating as simply a straight swapping of words? There's no such thing as an *equivalent* to a foreign word; the best we can find is a sort of parallel. I'm told that, if your first language is Welsh, the English word *lamb* means *something you buy at the butcher's*; but the parallel term in Welsh is full of poetry, evoking shepherds, the flocks on the hillsides, and the rest. So if the congregation is not to think of its Sunday joints at the wrong moment, Wales needs Welsh-speaking priests to say "Behold the Lamb of God" in Welsh. I don't think that the Gospel is watered down by our recognising that it contains a great deal of extreme language because of the Hebrew habits of expression underlying it. It is said that Hebrew has no word for *dislike* or *disapproval*: there is love, and there is hatred: nothing in between. That makes for a black-and-white world, and our sophisticated mode of thought, assisted by our language (English has much the largest of all vocabularies), makes possible a vast range of shades of meaning which would be quite literally *unthinkable* in Aramaic.

### It's A Wise Child

Of course, unless we are deprived children, we do call someone on earth "our father": to wit, our fathers. And this is fine, unless it stands in the light by which we learn to call God our Father. What Jesus is saying is that God is so absolutely, perfectly paternal towards our lives, that the human version pales into insignificance beside him; except that a good father is not to be understood as competing with the fatherhood of God, but representing it and expressing it to his child. Insofar as a human father's love is *transparent* to the love of God the Father, we should feel happy in according it the honourable name we do. Insofar as all our human relationships have about them a measure of human imperfection, we ought to keep a space around the words we use of God: yes, he is our Father - in that he is the true author of our lives, and we are made in his likeness, and he is responsible for us; but there are ways in which no human father is like God. What human father would not constantly prevent the accidents, disasters,

mistakes and sins into which we stray *if he had the power*? And here is God - whose power is acknowledged to be almighty - apparently ready to keep his distance, and let all these appalling things happen; what dread divine quality is there that can explain *this* kind of fatherhood to our human mind?

### Rabbi, Teacher, Father

So the words we use about God are true ones, but not quite the way we use them about our fellow human beings. Jesus warns us today particularly about the use of words of authority. We may experience authority in each other, but all power and truth actually belong to God *in his own right*. Human beings can only have them by reflection. So today we are reminded to use the great terms of value - words like "good", "true", "beautiful", "holy" and so on, *primarily* of God himself. It belongs to God in his mystery, far above our judgments and estimations, to be good, and true, and beautiful. One day, we hope to see him face to face, and then we shall know the real fulness of these things. We glimpse them in each other so imperfectly, yet they can already turn our hearts over and evoke in us something next door to worship. But *what we are to be in the future has not yet been revealed*. What will it be like, to be in the presence of God, whose being is all possible goodness, without the least admixture of imperfection? And what if God should find the way to communicate to us a share in his own divine life, a share in the fulness of joy? I think we should save up some of our big words for that day.  
*Fr Philip*