

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

The First Day Of The Week

The first day was marked by the breath of God moving over waters, the first words of the Creator, *Let there be light!* and the start of the work of Creation.

A New Creation

The concept of a new start to existence is a fundamental one for Christian religion. We never despair, we never write off the possibilities. There is never anything that is unforgivable, irreparable, or irretrievable.

This is because our account of the world is set to the music of the three theological virtues - faith, hope, and charity. We never lose faith in the God who designed this set-up, and so we do not regard it as expendable. We never lose hope in the presence and power of God, so nothing is beyond his reach. We never fail to love the Creator, so we are never allowed to discard the work of his hand, or to consign to perdition what he has loved and chosen. This attitude, which helps us to see the world as God sees it, and to do the work of God in his world, is the gift of the Holy Spirit. In a wonderful passage from St Hilary in the breviary on Friday, we read that our bodies would cease to work if there were no light for the eyes to see by, no word for the ears to hear, no scents for the nose to sniff, and so on. It is not that you would become blinded, deafened, or incapable of smelling, but just that your body would have nothing to work on. In the same way, says Hilary, your life would perish without the Spirit of God, who offers you the field in which your spiritual senses can begin to awaken. So the coming of the Holy Spirit is rightly said to happen "On the first day"; it is truly a birthday, like the first day of Creation.

Conspirators

There's a nice pair of words that apply to

all who share their lives: one is the friendly word *companions*, which comes from the Latin word *panis* and means people who share their bread; the other is *conspirators*, which comes from the Latin verb *spirare*, and means people who share their breath. Sometimes I feel that we share our breath because we are whispering in each other's ears (like Guy Fawkes). Sometimes I feel that it means something more intimate and less sinister, that we breathe the same air, live in the same space. But today I feel that we are conspirators with Christ, because the breath of God is in all of us, and therefore we are breathing in and out the Holy Spirit which the risen Lord breathed upon his Apostles in the Gospel.

Real and Artificial Respiration

Artificial respiration uses one person's lungs to fill the lungs of another. We are told in Genesis that "the Lord fanned the mud into a man, and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being." It seems that this insufflation of God brings with it a personal gift of life which inheres until God calls it back. The Psalm says: "You take back your Spirit, they die, returning from the earth to which they came. You send forth your Spirit, they are re-made; you renew the face of the earth." I suppose that the respiration stops being artificial when the patient begins to breathe by himself. Perhaps today we could stop thinking of our existence as something rational and scientifically applicable, with various modern physiological facts accounting for it, and start to think of each breath we take as a call to relate to the Holy Spirit, a call to grow in faith, hope, and love, the virtues that lead to God. To lack this sense is like being blind, deaf, and in all ways insensate to the reality of our life.

Fr Philip