

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

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## The Big Picture

Do you spend enough time thinking, too little, or too much? Is there time in your life for deliberation, meditation on the way your life is going? Or do you find yourself hustled forwards by the events and emergencies of each day, waking up to insistent demands, committed in advance to be here or there, not free to take a hand in the use of your day, the setting of priorities, the choice of concerns?

### The Washing-Machine

One irony of the invention of gadgets is that they were *designed* to set us free from the evils of the treadmill. What I think they have done is to enslave us more securely to the doing of work. As a child, I used to take twenty minutes to walk to school, twenty minutes with nothing to do, and little to look at that was unexpected. Coming home for lunch, that meant that for eighty minutes every school-day I was alone, dawdling along in a state of something like contemplation, seldom able to identify anything I had passed or noticed when I reached the other end. Today, I would cover the space in two minutes behind the wheel, and spend the other seventy-two minutes on very conscious interactive work, encounter, *business*. Now tell me: am I freer than the little child I was then, or more enslaved? Again, there is about washing clothes a lot that is beastly, wretched labour. But who would think very studiously about it whilst it was being done? Might there not have been precious time for the mind, whilst the repetitive processes were busying the body? How many destinies have been fixed in the mind whilst the fingers were shelling peas or scraping potatoes - simple and fulfilling tasks that I find I quite enjoy, and which have given their place in many lives to the queue for ready-made *lasagne* in Sainsbury's?

### A Place for Contemplation

The standing-back from life is vital to a human existence. Life that is compulsive can't be human, and much of our experience tends to be under pressure these days. We all take on too much, and this shows itself in the scamping, busking, unconsidered way of life which gets more and more exhausted and less and less significant. People condemned to live like this are prone to feeling worthless, unhappy, unfulfilled; and the urge to fill up emptiness with more and more experiences does not work well for them. *What does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and to lose his own soul?* "Less" may well be "more"; if we did less, and did it more calmly, more thoughtfully, and more purposely, wouldn't we do more that was of value? Don't think

I'm against washing-machines or cars; but I am sincerely against the weary pouring-away of meaning which I sense in our glittering, but very brittle civilisation.

### The Experience of Jesus

It is an influential fact that our faith should be drawn from a time so much simpler in material terms than our own. Compare the life of Jesus of Nazareth with that of his Vicar on earth, John Paul II. Not for Jesus the jumbo-jets, publishing-presses, Internet, Vatican bureaucracy. He lived a simple, basic life with no structures and no investment-portfolios. But it enabled him to meet a certain number of human beings at such a depth, and with such shocking effects on their lives, that he changed the history of the human race; of that fact there is no disputing, even amongst unbelievers. The simplicity and intensity of his life also enabled him to pick up a piece of ordinary bread, and a cup of common drink, and to speak over them words of such power, that these plain and simple articles became, for the whole of subsequent history, the port of entry for divine life into the human world. If we want to receive these sacramental gifts from his hands, if we want to enter through that narrow door where human beings can meet God, then we have to learn how to value little, humble things as truly and deeply as he did; because it is of small and humble things that our true life is made.

*Fr Philip*