

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

You Hate Nothing You Have Made

Lately we have been meditating, in Church and in the University, on the theme of the Creation. In itself it seems pretty simple, especially when we reflect on a line like: *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Everything there is, we say, God made.* It's easy to feel like this when we are surveying a vast panorama of beautiful scenery, under a luminous and highly-coloured sky. No-one can fail to be moved. But can we say it in the AIDS ward, and the Cambodian cemetery, and the War Crimes Tribunal, and the less savoury suburbs of São Paulo, and the lunatic asylum? In some places, the title is more of an act of faith than a heartfelt realization.

Lent - Mending and Befriending

Lent begins with the remembrance of this faith - that *God only makes what he loves*, and never changes his mind about this. If we want to receive this love, we must believe in such a Lover. And if we want to be loved like that, we must want to return the same kind of love. God says: *If you love me, love the child whom I have begotten.* This has to start with ourselves. There is a huge programme of work there: *to see ourselves as loveable*, we have to experience the love we have been offered. Has that ever happened incidentally, or immediately, or without a long process taking place? Human love needs time, thought, indwelling. Love is entered into, imagined, meditated. It may be seen as a colossal waste of time by one's employer, or the rest of one's family, but it demands absorption, which almost resembles obsession to an onlooker, before it becomes what it is. Our life with God takes time, and in order to give it that time we must return to God, as a tired worker returns home at the end of the day, gratefully entering into the peace and rest which is nowhere else to be found. And this "home" is our very own life, the space in the heart of us where we can be still, and centred. It is there that we will meet God who built our life, not as a lottery-line of random contents, but as a work of art, an architect-designed house, an irreplaceable recipe to the measure of his taste. To explore this house, not as a miser who never can be rich, but as a beloved son inheriting his home, is part of the work of Lent. *God loves this place, and longs to be welcomed in it.* Let us be still, then, and look at the place with new eyes.

Open the gates, for God is with us

Lent has to remember Baptism, as Passover Jews remember the Red Sea. It is Baptism that enables us to befriend our lives; and because it makes us members of Christ, it qualifies us to move through the Paschal mystery and to find ourselves made into the

Church. Being the true Body of Christ, we can then carry salvation to others as he did. Lent is not only a time for prayer, for quiet entry into the endlessness of the love of God. It is the time for almsgiving - for putting generosity where selfishness used to be. This demands honesty, and a radical acceptance that self-gratification and putting our comfort at the head of our list has taken possession of our agenda. That is why we have become insular and miserly. So *fasting* makes an integral part of the work of love in these holy days; even the secret indulgence, the apparently harmless private greed, has got to become a place of sacrifice - a private, secret sacrifice - so that the external growth of kindness we call almsgiving may be something more than an external display.

Lord, we do not know where you are going

It is true that, like Thomas the Apostle, we do not understand the way the Cross works. It staggers our understanding that God should take this path for us. Lent is a time to survey the map of our salvation, to let the story work on us. In this story we shall find the pure love of God, shining with its sovereign brilliance through the dreadful cataclysm of the Cross. In this tangle of betrayal, greed, fear, cruelty, weakness and sin God displays his holiness before all the world: he puts forth his arm in strength, and scatters the proud. Let us prepare to be astonished, and changed, and moved in our depths, and born to a new life. *Fr Philip*