

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. For Christians there's nothing 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. These attitudes, which help us to see the world as God sees it, and to do the work of God in his world, are gifts 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 snuff, 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* - bread - and means people who share the same bread; the other is *conspirators*, which comes from the Latin verb *spirare* - breathe - and means people who share the same air. 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 formed the mud into a man, and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being." Genesis believes 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." But how important it is that this *breath of God* doesn't just sit in us like jam in a jar, or pump into us like air in a balloon. We are involved in the breathing in and out of the gift of God. I suppose that respiration stops being "artificial" as soon as the patient begins to breathe by himself. Perhaps today we could stop thinking of our existence as something imposed on us, rational and scientifically explicable, with various physiological facts accounting for it, and start to think of each breath we take as a draught of the Holy Spirit, a drinking-in of faith, hope, and love, the virtues that lead to God. The world speaks of him: our life is a journey towards him: we are made for him, and he has given us by the work of revelation the gift of knowing him. To lack this knowledge of God as our Creator, who has allowed us to call him *Father*, is like being blind, deaf, in all ways insensate to the reality of our life. I don't think anyone who lacked it - however splendid his research and thoroughgoing his science - could claim to have understood human nature without this crowning insight into our destination in God. Today is the feast of our coming to know it, and our response to it, as it makes us its heralds, the servants of the world's hope. *Fr Philip*