

FROM THE PASTOR'S DESK



SMARTPHONE - A BLESSING?

Recently, I heard about a priest by the name of Fr. Alessandro Palermo who is assigned to the Church of St. Matthew in Marsala, Sicily. Fr. Palermo who is a young priest, only 30 years old, asked his parishioners to bring their smartphones and tablets to the church for a special blessing just before Christmas. In his blessing, the priest said this: "With the advent of the internet, our smartphones have become very important; we keep them always with us."

Through the years, I have been asked by people to bless many things - motorcycles, lotto tickets and even once a cat that was dead for three days (no kidding!). However, I have never been asked to bless a phone! There is no ritual blessing for a cell phone or an iPad as far as I know, so Fr. Palermo must have made one up. It was the priest's intention when blessing the smartphones and tablets that those who use them would employ them in a good way and not for immoral purposes.

With all the social media and technology prevalent in our day, we might wonder from time to time if it has become a blessing or a curse. On a journey to midtown Manhattan recently, I was noticing just how many people walk down the streets not looking up but gazing at their phones. That could be hazardous to your life! According to one study, American adults eat, sleep and breathe media - consuming an average of 12 hours a day.

One critic has stated that there is an addiction problem for some people when it comes to smartphones. They cannot put them down or part with them - this is especially true of our young people. At family parties at times instead of conversing, my nieces and nephews are texting. Maybe you have noticed that in your own families. Some studies have linked the increased use of technology with decreased concentration, lower problem solving skills - "brain drain" and even depression. Perhaps for Lent some of us should give up the internet instead of cookies or candy - it would be more of a sacrifice.

Certainly, social media can be a good thing. For instance, through Facebook, I have been able to keep in touch with old parishioners who I hadn't heard from in years. Like anything else, however, technology can be misused and abused. Social media is addictive and a lot of us waste hours on it - time which would be employed in much more productive ways.

It seems too in our American society that we never get away from noise - too much media - we're saturated. One African cardinal by the name of Robert Sarah has written an interesting book with this title: The Power of Silence. In his book, Cardinal Sarah writes, "Our world no longer hears God because it is constantly speaking, at a devastating speed and volume, in order to say nothing. Modern civilization does not know how to be quiet. It holds forth in an unending monologue." The Cardinal's words are something for us all to think about.

A good practice for our spiritual and religious lives is to take some time out each day and silently reflect upon a passage from the Bible. In order to concentrate and to pray, however, we need to turn the media and the cellphones off so as to really hear what the Lord is saying to us in His revealed word.

All of us can live without a smartphone but in the long run, we cannot live without God. Let us be smarter in our use of technology. May it truly be a blessing and not a problem!

Sincerely in Christ,
Fr. Jerome