

Heads Down

This past Holy Thursday, as a group of us sat on a school bus which was transporting us from church to church for a traditional visit of “seven churches,” I was gazing out the window at people sitting at tables in the illuminated pizza shops and restaurants along Acushnet Avenue. It was so striking to me how every person I saw at that late hour was alone in the eatery and staring at his or her smartphone. It immediately struck me as a sign of our times: we are addicted to our screens.



I'm not going to rant about the “evils of technology” like some old curmudgeon. The phones and the tablet are here to stay, and new things are, undoubtedly, coming down the pike. This is more of a reflection on the heads-down posture and the general handicap we all suffer of an impaired perspective on life. This handicap is the lack of “awe and wonder.” These terms are virtually convertible with the older term “fear of the Lord.”

Scripture tells us that “*the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*, (Prov. 9:10).” This archaic use of the word “fear” means something along the lines of “Wow!” or “Awesome!”. *Heads Up! Our God is an awesome God!* And, in a sense, it takes a “heads-up” posture to see and to be awestruck.

What happens when we are heads-down, looking at our phones or so completely absorbed in our own little worlds of worries, concerns, dramas and petty things, is that we can't truly see with eyes of awe and wonder. Moreover, small matters are magnified beyond their worth or import.

Remember, there was a day before cell-phones or smartphones when telephone calls required finding a “pay phone” and “dropping a dime” to call someone: The content of those telephone calls was, usually, not frivolous, but something important: After-all, you had to go out of your way to find a phone, and your time was limited.

Again, this is not an anti-technology rant. I love my smartphone! But, it is clear to me that there are spiritual values at issue: Where is there room to see and to contemplate the “bigger picture” and the “further horizon?” How will we acquire Holy Wisdom if there is no room for “fear of the Lord?”

I once heard a reputable youth minister of our diocese tell a group of kids that if they thought Mass was “boring” it was because they were “boring.” Wow! That is an interesting accusation. Mass is not boring when we have a broader experience of awe and wonder. After all, if you really sit down with the texts of the Mass readings and prayers, they are expressions of the most awesome and wondrous of realities: The Creator of the Universe is with us, and He cares about us, and He is guiding history toward a great and glorious end!



You don't get this sense of awe and wonder if you don't have it as a regular part of life . . . if there isn't any marveling at the birth of a baby, the structure of a sea-shell, the rising and setting of the sun, the self-transcending soul inside of you, and so much more. One writer refers to this as “the Wow Factor.” I need more of this in my own life and ministry. I don't see how we can grow as a Church and as a Parish without this spiritual consciousness. It is, after all, “the beginning of Wisdom.”