

Smart Phone Curiosity

And the New Evangelization

By Joe Tremblay

Recently, I saw a picture of St. Peter's Square when they announced a new pope, namely, Pope Benedict XVI, in 2005 contrasted with 2013, when the announced Pope Francis as the new pope. As for the latter, it looked as though every single person were using the video capacity of a smartphone. The world changed in those few years.

The blessing of a smartphone is that it not only facilitates communication, but it can do just about everything a computer can. Yet, with every positive, there is a corresponding negative. With texting, emails and the internet so readily available now, people are bound to experience a kind of chronic and insatiable curiosity. A curiosity about what, you might ask? A curiosity about the most recent text or email received. Although it is not true to say this about every user, it would seem that this curiosity continually draws people to their smartphones. And in doing so, people in the room and their immediate surroundings are often lost sight of. I would even go so far as to say it is becoming an addiction among many young Americans.



According to a recent *Wall Street Journal's* article, "A Rising Addiction Among Youths: Smartphones", South Koreans are suffering from this addiction in epidemic proportions:

"Earlier this month, the South Korean government said it plans to provide nationwide counseling programs for youngsters by the end of the year and train teachers on how to deal with students with addiction. Taxpayer-funded counseling treatment here already exists for adult addicts."

But the article goes on to give us something very insightful: With an over reliance on texting, especially among the youth, interpersonal and nonverbal communication becomes impoverished. "Students today are very bad at reading facial expressions," said Setsuko Tamura, a professor of applied psychology at Tokyo Seidoku University. "When you spend more time texting people instead of talking to them, you don't learn how to read nonverbal language." Furthermore, strong relationships require a sense of being present to family members and friends. Without this attentiveness, our dealing with others becomes superficial.

Yet, nonverbal communication is not the only thing that is compromised. This is where the New Evangelization can have relevance. The ability to think in silence for long periods of time is less attainable. This is important because thinking in silence is when our communion with God is most intense. What is more, the compulsion to communicate with and see the world through the smartphone distracts us from the following: From thoughtfully preparing for the day ahead, from

being attentive to our duties, and from examining each day in hindsight as it nears its end. I would go so far as to say that it hinders our creativity and productivity.

In decades past, children used to have to make their own fun. Today, it is already programmed for them. Children used to have the whole town as their playground. Today there's no need to even step outside. The family that used to travel for vacations was forced to talk to each other and experience the thrill of seeing new places in the same vehicle. Today each child has his or her DVD player and is watching his or her own movie. They might as well be in different vehicles.

Back to the smartphone: Modern technology is a benefit to us only if we are the masters of it. But if we are needlessly and constantly using it when there are more important matters that need tending to, then we have to learn to subdue our smartphone curiosity. Imposing self-discipline in this regard makes for good penance. It takes us back to the basics of using our own creative imagination.

The New Evangelization can provide a service here. It can remind people that the imagination is made for the infinite; that, it is best fostered when the mind is allowed to think- to think about time and eternity in silence. And as for simplicity, God knows we need it in our lives.