Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





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“When you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret” (Matt 6:6).

2 Kgs 2:1, 6-14; Mt 6:1-6, 16-18

Jesus understood the importance of interiority. In his instructions about almsgiving, prayer and fasting, often quoted at the start of Lent, Jesus tells us to operate out of our inner, hidden place, where God alone sees us. The person who has no interior self operates only to be seen. They do something good because they see themselves acting for an audience that rewards them with praise.

True spirituality can only grow within a cultivated interiorly. We need to be alone with ourselves and with God to sort out our motives and form our decisions independent of approval or disapproval. Contemplation before action is the secret of a well ordered, intentional life in which everything we do is done freely and for its own sake, not for the approval of others.

It is no surprise that contemplation was more highly regarded in agrarian and so-called primitive societies than by technologically advanced cultures obsessed with efficiency and productivity. Native resistance to mirrors and cameras as soul thieves was an early signal about the risks of self-reference leading to narcissism.

One predictable result of the rapid evolution of digital culture is the loss of interiority for a generation of screen users who surrender their lives to social media, where

their status is measured by the number of friends they have aggregated. Self-approval depends on group acceptance. Real life is replaced by virtual screen life, which can become addictive as programs collect search data to produce a profile of the user that mirrors back their own desires and preferences.

While the risks can be overstated and ignore the many benefits of the new technologies, the dangers are evident. Marshall McLuhan warned that all our technologies master and change us in ways we won’t understand until after the fact.

One test of our awareness of how modern life is changing us is how we handle being alone, silent, free of distractions or the urge to tune into the many voices that await our attention -- our phones, computers, televisions and other devices. Or how hard it is for us to slip away to our secret place to commune with God.

This is no luxury but a lifeline to the source of everything. God loves us more than we can imagine and wants us to pay attention to what is truly important. Jesus said that he came that we might have life, life to the full. It begins here, at the wellspring of divine mercy, where we meet God and receive the look of love, the truth that sets us free to be who we really are.

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