

Recently, I read a book named “iGen” by the sociologist Jean Twenge. This book studies the lifestyles, habits, and values of Americans born after 1995 when the use of smartphones became widespread. The basic premise of the book is that social media and texting have led to a loss of human interaction which has in turn led to a dramatic rise of anxiety, depression and loneliness among youth. While I agree with some of her arguments, there is also some other troubling data that she glosses over which might also account for this growing sense of isolation.

In her section on religion and spirituality, Twenge reveals that only one in three millennials still participate in religious services on a regular basis. The succeeding generations participate even less. This means that more and more Americans have no tie to religion in any meaningful way. In fact, the studies show that in 2015, 22% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders had never been to a single religious service, and we can only assume that these numbers are even higher now. Likewise, those who identify as being spiritual has plummeted as well, and many of the youth and young adults today no longer pray or believe in God.

The question that I have to ask myself is whether this growing sense of loneliness and isolation among many Americans is not only because of the way that technology can isolate us from one another, but is also because of the fact that technology can also separate us from God. I say this because in his famous essay about technology, the philosopher Martin Heidegger pointed out that technology, for all of its advances, also carries dangers. One of the greatest of which is the fact that it causes us to objectify the world around us and descend into materialism.

This growing descent into materialism and rejection of spirituality has dangerous effects on us as human beings. In the book of Genesis, we are told that God made us out of the earth and breathed His Spirit into us. Ultimately, this means that as human beings we are a unity of body and soul, tied both to the physical world

and the spiritual. Yet, as we continue to live in a society that discounts spiritual realities and descends ever further into materialism, we shouldn't be surprised that this results in a growing despair as we neglect part of that which makes us human.

The book of Genesis also tells us that we are made in the image and likeness of God. Theologians have drawn many different meanings from this over the centuries, but in the context of today's homily I think it is important to reflect on the fact that God Himself exists as a unity of persons. God exists in and through communion. As human beings made in God's image and likeness, we too are made to live in communion, communion with God and our fellow humankind. So, we should not be surprised to see how the growing isolation of human beings from one another and from God leads to depression and loneliness.

In our first reading, the prophet Isaiah says, "You are my servant, Israel, through whom I show my glory." He goes on to say, "It is too little for you to be my servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and restore the survivors of Israel; I will make you a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth." God is sending us forth as His servants, not only to the Church but also to the whole world. God is calling on us to go throughout the whole world and proclaim His great love so that all might be drawn into communion with Him and through that, into communion with one another. As Jesus told us before He ascended into heaven, "go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature."

This is the only true cure to the loneliness which we are facing, and yet far too often when we try to proclaim the Gospel, it falls on deaf ears. As we all know, this rejection of spirituality and religion happens for many different reasons. It happens because it challenges people's understanding of the truth and their sense of freedom. It happens because religions seems to lack relevance and foster intolerance. The list

can go on and on. But the real reason that most people reject our message is because they don't see that religion and spirituality have made a difference in our own lives.

Why should they believe our message when we ourselves don't believe it? Why should they believe our message when we ourselves are hypocritical and live the same way as everyone else? Why should they believe our message when we are just as unhappy and miserable as they are? If we want to be a light to the nations, then we ourselves must first embrace that light and let it transform our lives. Then, and only then, will the witness of our lives be attractive to those we encounter.

Think back to the figure of John the Baptist. He withdrew into the desert and lived a radical life that made people take notice. They flocked out to see him to discover how to live like him. And while they were there, John the Baptist saw Jesus coming towards him and proclaimed, "Behold, the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world." These people respected and trusted John so much that when he told them to follow Jesus, they went without hesitation.

If we want to lead others to Christ, then we too must learn to live our faith out authentically, in a way that shows people the difference that faith makes in our lives. The moment that they are able to recognize that we have a joy that they lack in their own lives, a joy that they themselves desire, then they will be ready to listen to us when we speak. And when we point to Jesus, they will be ready to follow after Him wherever He leads them. While it is true that the world is filled with suffering people, it is not a world without hope. We must go out into the darkness and share with them the light, inviting them to leave their isolation and enter into communion with us and our Lord so that they may nourish their souls at this Eucharistic table.