

A View from the Pew

by Deacon Greg Kandra

Unsolved Mystery

Is it possible to know too much? I'm beginning to think so.

Recently, during a visit to my doctor, she ran a series of health statistics through a computer and reported some astonishing news.

The chances of my having a major cardiac event in the next ten years are 3 percent.

That's the good news.

The bad news? The other 97 percent.

I'm sure, someday soon, they will arrive at formulas that can predict with some certainty how long we will live. Who knows? Maybe they'll find a way to calculate the date of death.

That really is, to use a familiar phrase, TMI—too much information.

One of the wonders of life is its mystery—our human inability to know what lies in store, and how it all will end. Our lives unfold, chapter by chapter, episode by episode, with more calamities and comedy and hair-breadth escapes than an old Saturday afternoon serial. We seek meaning in the mystery, struggling to unravel its threads.

It is woven into the fabric of our faith, too. Is there anything more mysterious than Incarnation? Resurrection? The changing of bread and wine into body and blood? Salvation by the cross? The very elements that are the cornerstones of our religion seem so implausible.

Which, maybe, is why they stir us so. We surrender to them because they are so unlikely, it seems that they just have to be true.

And we celebrate that. We veil the mystery in incense and chant, and bow before it, awed. We seek to fathom the unfathomable, and comprehend the incomprehensible.

That is the very root of faith, any faith. There are some things that simply can't be understood or rationalized or explained. You simply have to believe.

But we've done a very good job of not believing, of grounding the mysterious down to a pulp, so that there's a likely explanation for everything. We can pinpoint the sex of each unborn baby (if it hasn't been preselected already) and even pick its birthday. Scholars have carbon-dated the Shroud of Turin (though that's still being debated), and they've decided to attribute Jesus' walking on water to a simple case of low tide. Of course, in the age of Dan Brown, everything is suddenly suspect.

But whatever happened to belief? To faith? To living life as it comes, with all its uncertainty and mystery?

I'm glad that a computer thinks I have a 97 percent chance of not having a heart attack any time soon. It will certainly make it easier for me to plan vacations. My wife and I will both sleep easier. That slice of cheesecake at the diner is looking better every minute.

But, after a certain point, I'd rather not know too much. A little knowledge really is a dangerous thing—dangerous to diets and, I think, to other aspects of the human condition.

I'd rather live in the unsolved mystery—turning over life one page at a time, waiting to be astonished at what happens next.



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