

A View from the Pew

by Deacon Greg Kandra

You've Got Spam

Judging from the material flooding my computer, I'm a man in serious need of help.

People I have never met are offering me all sorts of assistance. They want to lower my mortgage, raise my income, perk up my love life and give me a free vacation.

When I return to my office from lunch, I'm told that I have also inherited a fortune in Kenya, and that there is a lottery ticket waiting for me to claim it in Nairobi. Someone is offering me a killer deal on a giant plasma TV, and a pill that can cure the baldness that I never knew I had.

In short: I am a man being bombarded with spam.

I'm not talking about processed meat that comes in a can. I'm talking about junk mail that somehow eludes the filters and firewalls at my office, slides into my email, and then badgers me.

If that weren't bad enough, I go home and open our mailbox, and a blizzard of catalogs and fliers falls to the floor. People want to buy our apartment. They want to sell our apartment. They want me to vote for them. They want me to give them money. Orphans are pleading, diseases are multiplying, animals are starving. Colleges are offering me pottery classes, and clothing companies are offering me maternity dresses. I receive holy medals from nuns, address labels from veterans, and plastic rosaries from an Indian reservation in Oklahoma. Someone sends me a nickel, taped to a card, just to get my attention.

I pity our mailman. I pray for relief.

We are a culture under assault. Modern life, I think, has given us too many distractions, and there are a thousand little causes and concerns pleading for our attention, our prayers, our money.

They aren't all charitable, of course. That great lover of the outdoors, L.L. Bean, has felled countless trees to print millions of thick catalogues with the explicit intent of getting me to give them my money in exchange for a small bottle of maple syrup.) The world has gotten entirely too noisy.

And noise, as any contemplative will tell you, is the enemy of peace, and the greatest rival to God.

Evil doesn't necessarily come with cloven hooves and a pitchfork. It comes with coupons and free return address envelopes. It is a distraction, and a nuisance. It's the fly buzzing around our head, seeking to be swatted, when what we are really trying to do is simply to think, or to ponder, or to pray.

In heaven, there is no spam. There are no catalogues. There are no cards from real estate companies, offers from creditors, investment opportunities from off-shore industries. There are no orphans with dreaded illnesses cuddling abandoned puppy dogs that are being cared for by stoic nuns on an Indian reservation somewhere in Kenya.

And maple syrup is delivered to your door, for free.

God came to Elijah in a whisper. He remains with us in silence. "Silence," Thomas Merton wrote, "like the sunlight, will illuminate you in God."

How I wish the world had more sunlight in these cloudy and clouded times.

Actually, maybe there is more sunlight. But from my perch, buried under catalogues and spam, I can't tell.

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