

A View from the Pew

by Deacon Greg Kandra

My iPod and I

Is there a support group for device addicts? If so I need to join. My name is Greg and I'm an iPodaholic.

It began innocently enough. Years ago, shortly before Christmas, an electronics store near my office announced it was going out of business. They had a massive sale. I convinced myself that this was something I needed. I seem to recall the same conversation going on in my head when I bought a digital SLR camera a couple years earlier—a camera that I have used, I think, twice. (Okay, maybe three times.) I'm easily persuaded by the arguments that go on at odd hours in my brain; I think my cranium has a full-time lawyer on staff.

I took the plunge—and soon I became like Ray Milland in *The Lost Weekend*.

I started downloading songs at 99 cents a pop (nowadays they are \$1.99). I started leafing through my CD collection to see what favorite songs I had that I could include on my playlist. Now, if I hear a few refrains of a familiar song on TV while changing channels, a synapse snaps and I'll say, "Hey! That should be on my playlist!" And within moments, it's downloaded. Games? Yes! I once downloaded a bowling program and became mesmerized by electronic spares, strikes and splits.

I have convinced myself that my addiction is only part-time. I really only listen to music or watch videos on my device on my way back and forth to work. It consumes perhaps a half-hour of my day. Okay. Maybe 45 minutes. But never more than an hour at a time. Unless there's a delay on the subway.

Or there's nothing on TV in the evenings. Honest. I remain dazzled by tiny devices (nowadays the smart-phone) that contain or stream thousands of songs and hours of video. You can now hold the world, or a significant piece of it, in the palm of your hand.

I know, of course, that there is a downside to this addiction. For one thing, my ears feel naked without headphones. (I have large ear sockets that don't hold the pods very well.) And I spend entirely too much time listening to digital noise. Nice noise, sure, melodic noise, even pretty noise. But it still is there to drown out the sound of real life.

My ears are not attuned as much to the clatter of the subway or the cries of babies or the heavy sighing of the sad old woman sitting next to me in the car. I don't hear the wind when I walk, or arguments at the stoplight. I'm hearing James Taylor or Counting Crows or Billy Joel.

Am I, in the process, tuning out the quiet voice of God?

It's a question for me to wonder about and pray over. It's a question, maybe, that more of us need to be asking. The conveniences of the world have put everything in our pocket. Everything, it seems, but silence.

For now, I'm trying to make peace with my addiction and convince myself that I will consume only in moderation. Rationalization. No doubt, that's just one more sign that I'm irretrievably hooked...

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