

A View from the Pew

by Deacon Greg Kandra

Taking Flight

Years ago, when my wife and I were flying back to New York from a trip, our plane swooped over Forest Hills, almost directly over Queens Boulevard and Our Lady Queen of Martyrs.

“Look at that,” I said, pointing out the window to the stone bell tower beneath just us. “Just think. This is what Queen of Martyrs looks like to God!”

It occurs to me now that the God’s-eye view would be very similar if the Almighty had an apartment on the top floor of the Kennedy House. At any rate, the view was sudden and unexpected—and certainly not something I see every day. But views like that are increasingly common. We aren’t often bewildered or awed by the prospect of flight. Seeing the world from above has become pretty routine.

When the apostles stood with Jesus at the hill of his Ascension and saw Him rise heavenward, they could not have imagined what He saw below as he disappeared. (Did He even look below? Did He give a second glance to the world He was leaving behind? Somehow, I think not. I suspect if His eyes were directed anywhere, they were at what lay ahead, and what was above.)

Well, now we know what the world looks like from above. We’ve been up there, in the clouds—though not exactly in heaven—and we’ve watched the world become more distant. We’ve even seen the pictures of earth from space: a blue orb on a vast black velvet canvas.

But if you want the experience of flight, without even leaving your living room, technology has now given us Google Earth. Download this application, for free, onto your computer, type in an address and, within seconds, you are soaring over the earth and right to that exact destination. Move the cursor around the controls and you can—at least visu-

ally—fly from point to point. It’s something to see. The people at Google Earth have somehow managed to photograph and map out virtually every inch of the world. The images are real, and the sense of vertigo at times can be disorienting.

Google Earth has some nifty features for taking 3D tours of the world’s cathedrals, or tours of underwater terrains; it also showcases some of the world’s most famous sports stadiums. All this, and flying too. With a few clicks of Google Earth, anyone can feel like Peter Pan, Superman—or even, perhaps, God.

But is this a good thing?

We are already losing our sense of wonder about the world. We can talk to one another through clips attached to our ears and can see people thousands of miles away on our computers by using Skype. We carry thousands of songs in a piece of plastic smaller than a matchbook, and watch movies and TV shows anytime, almost anywhere, thanks to the wizardry of DVRs and iTunes. Remember when you actually needed a quarter and telephone to talk to someone? And a TV Guide to find out what’s on TV? It seems like ancient history.

I try not to take it all for granted. I still feel a thrill when a plane is taxiing down a runway and the wheels leave the earth and we find ourselves, literally, soaring. (Okay, some of that is dread, and hoping that we don’t come down to earth sooner than expected.)

As experiences that were science fiction a generation ago become commonplace, we need to remind ourselves of the wonder and imagination and genius behind it all.

And remember where it all began.