The advent of the internet has opened wide possibilities to human communication, increasing man’s ability to do great good and also great evil. I myself was converted to the Faith through contact with Catholics on the internet. This fact about the internet has helped spread the Gospel to souls who would be otherwise cut off from the message (we think here, in particular, of those under Muhammadan domination). In recent times we have seen the great silver lining of the lockdown in exposing many more Catholics to the Traditional Latin Mass.

Social media, however, was designed by its creators to psychologically manipulate its users into an addiction. As Facebook co-founder Sean Parker admits, they were “exploiting a vulnerability in human psychology…we understood this consciously and we did this anyway.” This was done through a system designed to affect every person on a fundamental level. Social media amplifies the natural response to human interaction, twisting it into a packaged, consumable unit of good feelings and mass-producing the effects a hundredfold. One sees the remarkable effects of this in any public place. The vast majority of people are sitting, standing, or walking around with their eyes fixed on a hand-held computer screen. Without a doubt, a man from the 1950s seeing this would think he had walked into a dystopian science fiction novel.

Growth in Effeminacy

Social media works by giving consolations and then creating attachments to these consolations through “likes,” “retweets,” and “followers.” This may seem unbelievable, but try paying attention to how you feel when you receive these throughout the day. Try putting your phone down for an entire day and see if you feel an urge to pick it up again to check for notifications. Most people feel an urge to pick up their phone and check within seconds of having any free time.

Attachments to these consolations leads to the vice of effeminacy, which is a reluctance to suffer due to an attachment to pleasure (cf. Aquinas, ST II-II, q. 138, a. 1). This attachment is the foundation of social media’s popularity and also its ability to be the cause of spiritual ruin. For the embracing of suffering is at the heart of the Gospel. Thus, Our Lord says that “whosoever doth not carry his cross and come after Me, cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:27). Similarly, *The Imitation of Christ* declares, “He wishes you to learn to bear trial without consolation, to submit yourself wholly to Him that you may become more humble through suffering” (Bk. II, ch. 2).

This suffering can range from small nuisances to overwhelming duress. We encounter suffering when we encounter other people because other people inevitably irritate us or inconvenience us. They have different opinions, manners, or speech. We have to change our

Copyright © catholicfamilynews.com. All rights reserved.

behavior for their sake to show them courtesy and respect. Some people are rude, unkind, and even corrupted with evil. But suffering with the insufferable is the mark of a Christian.

But to one who is effeminate and attached to pleasures found in the world of social media, it becomes difficult to suffer with others. Social media takes away the normal face-to-face interaction we ordinarily have with our fellow man. Thus, it is easy to hurl insults at another person without saying it to their face, which would normally deter this sort of behavior. One can even do so anonymously online without any apparent consequence. But make no mistake, Our Lord clearly warns us that “every idle word that men shall speak, they shall render an account for it on the day of judgment” (Matt. 12:36).

The Mortal Sin of Reviling

This brings us to the less obvious spiritual peril of social media. On the one hand, we are aware of the obvious spiritual peril of pornography and other such evils, but many Catholics may be surprised to read what St. Thomas says about reviling. This sin consists of publicly bringing dishonor to a person using words:

> Now railing or reviling deserves the punishment of hell, according to Matthew 5:22, “Whosoever shall say to his brother … Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.” Therefore, railing or reviling is a mortal sin.
>
> … Since, then, railing or reviling essentially denotes a dishonoring, if the intention of the utterer is to dishonor the other man, this is properly and essentially to give utterance to railing or reviling: and this is a mortal sin no less than theft or robbery, since a man loves his honor no less than his possessions. If, on the other hand, a man says to another a railing or reviling word, yet with the intention, not of dishonoring him, but rather perhaps of correcting him or with some like purpose, he utters a railing or reviling not formally and essentially, but accidentally and materially…. Hence, this may be sometimes a venial sin, and sometimes without any sin at all. Nevertheless, there is need of discretion in such matters, and one should use such words with moderation, because the railing might be so grave that being uttered inconsiderately it might dishonor the person against whom it is uttered. In such a case a man might commit a mortal sin, even though he did not intend to dishonor the other man: just as were a man incautiously to injure grievously another by striking him in fun, he would not be without blame. (ST II-II, q. 72, a. 2)

Copyright © catholicfamilynews.com. All rights reserved.

Here one may ask, *What does it mean to dishonor a man?* It is the opposite of honoring someone, which means to bear witness to the excellence of someone through signs or words (cf. ST II-II, q. 103, a. 1). Thus, “honor” is a verb for manners and respect. Dishonor means to detract from the respect that someone deserves by virtue of who they are. St. James the Less expresses it this way in his New Testament Epistle:

> “The tongue no man can tame, an unquiet evil, full of deadly poison. By it we bless God and the Father: and by it we curse men, who are made after the likeness of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be (Jam. 3:8-10).

Man is made “after the likeness of God,” and therefore he is deserving of honor and respect by his nature. St. Thomas points out that, with or without the intention of doing dishonor, reviling can be a mortal sin. Social media, through its constructed system of consolations and attachments, is able to facilitate a world of reviling without consequence but rather reward. St. Thomas says that “there is need of discretion in such matters, and one should use such words with moderation.” But such things as these are not rewarded by the social media system, and there is always a temptation to revile another man in order to gain the virtual accolades of others. This has led many to enter into foolhardy disputes that would rarely occur in person, leading to spiritual and eternal peril.

Copyright © catholicfamilynews.com. All rights reserved.



Avoid Being a Slave

Taking these things into consideration, it is essential that every soul learns to avoid slavery to social media in order to grow spiritually. Everyone needs to practice detachment from consolations, and that’s why we have fasting and abstinence. Every earthly consolation needs to be moderated so that our spiritual lives may not be hindered, nor our souls fall into any kind of sin. This is true with phone notifications no less than with food. Therefore, it is fundamental to our spiritual lives to create space for detachments from pleasures such as Social Media.

One method is to take one day per week, perhaps Sunday, to put your phone down and never pick it up for notifications until the following day. This may be hard at first, but this will only reveal how much you are attached to your phone. Another method is disciplining yourself to only look at your phone during certain times of the day.

Another consideration is this: Does this social media help me grow in my spiritual life? Am I more zealously fulfilling the duties of my state in life by using this app? If the answer to these is no, why not delete the app? If there is no profit to your soul, but rather detriment, then it is not worth it.

Furthermore, perform an examination of conscience: *Am I showing proper honor to others*

Copyright © catholicfamilynews.com. All rights reserved.

online, or do I fall into the sin of reviling? Can I tame my tongue or is it let loose by social media? As we have seen, the saints have strong words for this vice, and it is not to be taken lightly. Even as secular and ecclesiastical politics continue to provide opportunities for disputes, we must hold fast to truth as well as to charity, so that we may not find ourselves in spiritual ruin.

If we can manage the negative effects of social media by God’s grace, the technology can then be used for God’s greater glory and the salvation of souls. This is the path that many saints have trodden before, as they used the new technology of their day to spread the Gospel and assist the Church. Let us be sons of our Holy Fathers, and, having purified ourselves from sin and attachments, let us take up this tool to use it for God’s glory, and not our own. “Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to Thy Name give glory” (Ps. 113:9).

Copyright © catholicfamilynews.com. All rights reserved.