

May 8, 2020

One of the books that I read last Advent was, **How To Do Nothing: Resisting The Attention Economy** by Jenny Odell. I think I might have mentioned it in my Christmas homilies. Little did I know that by early Lent I would be doing nothing just like many of you.

We, all or most of us anyway, got to a way of living that put a value on what we did, we were like personal brands that we put out in the market place every day and by that I mean, many of us, would evaluate the day in terms of how we spent our time and the more time that we could account for the better the day.

We were not necessarily conscious of that, but we gave our time value ratings and downtime was the lowest on the ladder of worth which may be why many of us relatively unaffected by this pandemic are so anxious to get out and about again.

I think that may be one of the reasons older people often complain about not sleeping well because sleep makes them anxious because they are not spending time as well as they think they could.

We had a funeral a few years back for a very wealthy successful man who confided in me a few years before he died that he believed that if you just kept active, kept making and keeping lots of plans, you could stay healthy and not die. He really believed it at the time.

It doesn't work that way.

I want to give you a rather extensive quote from the book so you can think about it:

“Already in 1877, Robert Louis Stevenson called busyness a “symptom of deficient vitality,” and observed “a sort of dead-alive, hackneyed people about, who are scarcely conscious of living except in the exercise of some conventional occupation.”

And, after all, we only go around once.

Seneca, in “On the Shortness of Life,” describes the horror of looking back to see that life has slipped between our fingers. It sounds all too much like someone waking from the stupor of an hour on Facebook:

Look back in memory and consider...how many have robbed you of life when you were not aware of what you were losing, how much was taken up in useless sorrow, in foolish joy, in greedy desire, in the allurements of society, how little of yourself was left to you; you will perceive that you are dying before your season!³

On a collective level, the stakes are higher. We know that we live in complex times that demand complex thoughts and conversations—and those, in turn, demand the very time and space that is nowhere to be found.

The convenience of limitless connectivity has neatly paved over the nuances of in-person conversation, cutting away so much information and context in the process. In an endless cycle where communication is stunted and time is money, there are few moments to slip away and fewer ways to find each other.”

I know that many, many of you are finding this difficult and you want to get back to where we were last Christmas but let us not forget those who are very traumatized by the lack of income, the children under nourished in so many ways, the whole army of self-sacrificing public and private servants, the homeless and, especially, the women and children in abusive situations.

The rush to get back to Church needs to be tempered by the suffering of so, so many, deprived and denied consolations far more necessary than being together in our Church which I achingly look forward to as much as anyone.