



Free Time and Information Overload

Most probably the inventors of the internet, which modestly started as a small information sharing network, did not hope, even in their wildest dreams, that in less than 50 years their invention will evolve into what is today the greatest information exchange that ever existed. The library of Alexandria? Child play! Think about all that goes through the internet today: websites, e-mail, news, TV, social networks, entertainment, financials, do-it-yourself, phone calls, video calls, encyclopedias, e-books, maps and we're just scratching the surface. All you want is there waiting to be found at the literal touch of a finger. Nobody asks anyone anything before they "google" the information.

With an internet connection at hand one feels like a kid in a toy store, always ready to engage and discover. You wake up in the morning and the first thing you do is check your phone. Did I miss anything while I was asleep? How is the stock market doing? Any emergencies at work? How are my friends on Facebook, any silly selfies? Did anyone like my Instagram? How many likes did I get? We walk like zombies with our eyes glued to our smartphones even before we had the chance to get a cup of coffees. And who invented the rule that you can't text and drive? Was it not enough that you can't drink and drive? Lucky enough there are the red lights, where everyone checks what happened in the last three minutes from the previous red light. You don't believe me? Look around next time you're at a red light, that is if you're not on your phone.

This avalanche of information about everything and anything has turned all of us into information junkies. We constantly check our phones waiting for the next piece of news or conversation to pop out. We live and breathe information. There is only one downside to this addiction, we start having less and less time. Paradoxically, when we can find anything quicker than ever, we end up having less time than ever. Work doesn't get finished, conversations, unless virtual, are on the brink of extinction, human interactions are a bare because they take you away from the urge to know everything right now!

Where does this knowledge lead us to? One may say that if we search for the right information it is a good thing. Say one is interested in God; using just a smartphone one can find all the translations of the Bible ever imagined, all the writings of the Fathers, one can ask for spiritual advice online or even virtually attend a streamed Sunday service. Many times however we remain at the level of the search. Mesmerized of the information about the faith we don't have time anymore to actually live the faith. With so many virtual prayers books available we find no time to pray.

Having knowledge about God however does not mean one knows God. God is not in the information about Him. To know God is to be with Him, to experience the unmediated communion with Him. Knowledge is good only if it leads to action, knowledge without action is useless or even plain dangerous. Adam and Eve knew that they would die if they ate from the tree, yet they got tempted with the promise of even more knowledge. They knew enough to keep them in communion with God, to live forever in bliss without lacking anything, yet they wanted more and in that temptation they lost paradise. Sometimes knowing more, especially before time, can lead us astray from practicing what we already do know. Our Christian forefathers have survived the Turks and the communists and everything else that stood against them not because they knew everything about God and their faith, but because they took the time to apply what they already knew in every moment of their lives.



We should not understand all this as a rebellion against knowledge and an invitation to obscurantism, but as a warning against the mirage of “knowing it all” that can be all consuming. Taking time for personal prayer, to physically be in church, to visit a friend in the hospital, to feed the hungry where they live, will help us more in discovering God than accessing raw information about Him. Knowing the Scriptures and the theology is fine, but God is not a theoretical Being, He is a real Trinity of Divine Persons that interact with each other and with us. From this interaction we learn Who He is and who we are; by doing, by loving, by being together, now and into eternity.

A story from the monks of Egypt speaks about three brothers that were occasionally visiting an elder. Two of them always took advantage of the visits and had many questions to ask. The third one always just sat with them, asking nothing. After a few visits the elder asked him directly ‘Don’t you have any questions? Don’t you want to know more?’ The brother answered ‘For me is enough to be in your presence’. In the era of free but overwhelming information, we should consider taking the advice of the wise brother and, maybe, from time to time, just break free from the internet and acknowledge the presence of God around us. Share a cup of tea with a friend, watch a child at play, listen to a bird’s song, and, by taking this time to think about God, you might be able to hear God knocking at the door of your heart.