

Along the track

Intelligence isn't Artificial

A couple of afternoons a week I pick up my two little granddaughters from school. Along with the others, they burst through the gates and run along the path. Walking is rarely an option, especially if there is a puddle in sight or if nature has left the gift of autumn leaves or wildflowers in the grass. There seems to be an immediate connection. A game with incomprehensible rules is included in these few minutes but it is a joyful moment of connection with others and creation.

It may be brief, but it is an important time. So much in our world draws us away from moments of real connection. Without doubt, computers have been an enormous boon, and I guess that almost every one of us uses them multiple times every day in some form or other. I don't pretend to be an expert in AI; in fact, I know virtually nothing about it, but it certainly offers much through automation and advanced data analysis. If we are to believe what we are told, then human error is reduced and efficiency is increased, and so the list goes on. It is interesting to read, for example, about the extraordinary range and accuracy of surgery performed by robots.

Despite all that, our times seem to be dominated by a sense of apprehension, even fear among some. There is more anxiety, impatience and, sadly, more rage — and there's a lot of that about. Pope Leo XIV is already voicing concerns about the impact and power of social media, AI and so on. On the other hand, we seem to live in a world where there is more curiosity, where we seek more information and more things to achieve and to do. Perhaps we can thank access to technology and media for that. We are more aware of what's going on, of what remains incomplete or unfinished, and of what more there is to be done. Learning is never complete; the world is still evolving, and that striving for completion in one area leads to new challenges or goals in another.

Screen time spent on TV, e-games, digital tablets and smartphones is a regular part of children and young people's lives. Parents report that excessive screen time is the top health concern they have for their children, and they are worried that their children spend too much time on electronic devices. Parents voice their concerns about the misogyny which has spread through social media, dragging women back from rightful gains. Others voice concerns about the

power of influencers, and how willing others are to listen to them without question. Influencers seem to be able to acquire influence and wealth without doing anything at all of real consequence.

When I watch these little people after school connecting with each other and with nature, there is a strong message in that. As their parents and siblings watch, there is a sharing of laughter and stories. It is too easy to take these times for granted. Is that what the late Pope Francis was alerting us to, not just the care of creation but our connection with it? He lamented the fact that we are losing our attitude of wonder, of contemplation, of listening to creation. In other words pay, attention to what God is doing right now.

Today creating and treasuring moments of real connection, not on screens but 'in the flesh' as it were, is becoming more important. Don't just wait until they arrive, create them too! As the late Pope Francis reminded us, it is a world we want to listen to and learn from, but we have some news of our own to bring. We have a message of hope, we can make things better, we can be someone who brings peace and purpose in what many feel are troubled times. Just as in every age, there is a longing for security, for community, for belonging, for dignity and respect. When we take the time to connect, to reach out and care for those around us we all grow in the knowledge that we are safe and wanted, necessary and loved.

Pope Benedict XVI wrote: "Each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed. Each of us is loved. Each of us is necessary." Are these the times when we have to make more effort to find ways to help others understand that, to feel it and to live it? Being a facilitator of connection for others and creation can make a big difference. Everything is connected. Making that a reality will benefit us all.

Regards
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