

THE THIRD ORDER

Of the Society of St. Pius X



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Dear Postulants and Professed members,

Few of you would disagree that one of the strongest allurements away from the living of a spiritual life is modern entertainment. As you well know, it takes countless forms, including cinema, television, the internet, music, computer games and professional sports. Is entertainment just another form of healthy recreation for body and soul, enabling us to better fulfil our normal responsibilities? Or is it rather something akin to sweets or alcohol which should be enjoyed in moderation?

The word "recreation" means literally "re-creation". What needs to be re-created exactly? Essentially our body, but also indirectly our soul inasmuch as while on earth it is united to that body.

Neither brute animals (like the family dog) nor angels (like St Michael) require or are even able to experience re-creation. Why is this? It is because re-creation is only possible to a being which is part-matter and part-spirit. Thus only human beings, who have their foot in both the material and spiritual camps, are capable of and need re-creation. Although what each of us sees in the mirror is a *true* image of oneself, it is not the *whole* picture, and the fact that the family dog never knowingly admires himself in the mirror (unless he "thinks" it is another dog) proves this. What we see is what mum and dad gave us through procreation, but even the very desire to look in the mirror testifies to a spiritual principle infused into our body by God when it was ready to receive it.

Now a pure spirit (angels are the only creatures who are so) uses no physical energy in order to move, because it has no material parts that *can* be moved. Fatigue and tiredness can only be suffered by a creature with a body whose energy can be depleted. Thus our human body can and does tire through activity and subsequent loss of energy, and so needs food and rest to restore itself in preparation for more work. But if we are part-angel, why should we become tired? While united to our body, our spiritual soul (animals & plants have souls, but they *are not* spiritual) is dependant on the body for all of its operations. Our spiritual soul can indeed live without our body (as do all the departed souls who await the General Judgement), but this isn't its natural state. In like manner we can physically survive without the one we dearly love, but their presence is the more perfect state.

Being entirely *dependant* on the body in this life, our *soul* is limited in its activity when its *body* is tired. Studying is difficult after a big meal, and too much alcohol slows our intellect and weakens our will. Intellect and will are spiritual powers, but a tired (as an athlete) or imperfect (like for those with Down's Syndrome) body blocks and impair their proper function. An angel doesn't need re-creation because it doesn't have a body capable of fatigue, and a brute animal doesn't have a spiritual soul whose mind and will can be impaired. We must *choose* time for recreation, but instinct-led animals cannot knowingly choose *anything*.

To re-create is to get out of our animal nature for a time, and it might aptly be called the food of a body-bound spirit. Re-creation is an opportunity to do things specifically human, such as laugh at a joke, cry by reading a sad story, use the mind in a game of chess or enjoy beautiful literature and music. Moreover, re-creation goes even further by heightening, ennobling and developing our human side. All of the foregoing activities mix spirit and matter, and so are unique to us humans. You can tell a joke to a horse, but at the most you will get a horse laugh.

Most modern entertainment doesn't fit the description of true re-creation or leisure. In its extreme state, it is more or less entirely passive. Of course it couldn't be experienced at all unless there were *some* activity in the subject, but it often induces a trance-like state whereby the 5 senses (especially sight and sound, the mind's best servants) are flooded with a heavy dose of light, colour and noise. The subject is often only active in the way a football is active when kicked around a playing field.

Much entertainment is like a shrivelled, mutated form of true re-creation, which in its more perfect form involves the interaction of 2 subjects, whether this other subject be also a person (as in playing a game of chess with another person) or an inanimate subject (like playing a violin). Modern entertainment often shuts down one

side of the re-creation equation, with often all the activity coming from the *inanimate*¹ side, such as in the playing of computer games or going to the cinema, where the un-real sensations (eg. special effects & fast-moving camera shots) largely shut down one's human operations.

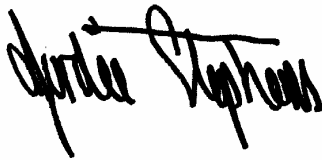
Why do so many crave this sensation-intense, mostly one-directional flooding of our senses which brings us closer to animals than to angels?

Modern entertainment is a form of escape. Escape from what? From a modern life almost entirely at odds with our human nature. I need not list the multiform ways that modern life is unnatural, as you know them too well, but one of them has to do with guilt. The widespread and stubborn denial of an ultimate moral absolute to which we must answer has terrible consequences. If guilt (the sting in one's soul after doing what we know to be wrong) is denied, then how can it be made known and relieved thereby, whether by priest, psychologist or friend? If guilt builds up without some outlet, one's soul becomes like a stinking and swollen sore full of putrid matter which one would rather turn away from than examine. The call of conscience for the painful but necessary examining of one's soul is deliberately or subconsciously drowned out by intense sense experiences such as loud music and ever-widening widescreen televisions. Surely you have all seen the erupting of such a sick soul to your mentioning horrible sins which they are likely guilty of, such as abortion. Your words are as welcome as a scalpel and vinegar to an open wound. Moreover, with how many people is intelligent conversation rendered almost impossible because of a life devoted largely to sense experience? The animal man doesn't understand the things of God, says St Paul, and many suffer from over-developed senses and under-developed minds and wills. As the old saying goes, if you don't use it, you'll lose it.

What about "harmless" entertainment, where there is nothing morally objectionable? This is an alluring trap, in which the devil has caught many. Satan wants to switch off the lights of our mind, so as not to recognise God and thereby love Him. Thus whether the senses engage in moral or immoral activity doesn't bother him so much. If this darkness of mind is achieved by a high dose of the Wiggles, then his purpose is achieved. He doesn't mind whether you sleep through life or actively do evil, as both roads lead to the same fiery destination.

Modern entertainment is mostly isolating as opposed to social, overwhelming our senses not to be instruments moderately used by the mind and will to elevate them, but stopping short at the thrill and pleasure of mere sensible excitement. Our Lord did not come to give us this sort of life, but He came that we might have life, and have it more abundantly. This ennobled and abundant life refers not only to the supernatural participation in God's own nature given to us by sanctifying grace, but also to a natural life in which our mind and will have an opportunity by good re-creation to heighten our sense of beauty, goodness and truth, and lead us to their Source. Let's not accept the cheap substitute for good re-creation offered by the modern world, but rather let us spend our leisure time in enriching our souls with all the sweetest fruits of Christian culture.

In the Sacred Heart, through the Immaculate heart of Mary,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jordie Stephens". The signature is written in a cursive, somewhat stylized font.

Fr Jordie Stephens
Spiritual Director of the Third Order of SSPX for Australia

¹ That which is inanimate doesn't have a soul, like a rock or a television screen. In latin 'anima'=soul.