

The Most Holy Trinity

I asked another priest this week if he'd read *Magnifica humanitas*, Pope Leo's new encyclical on artificial intelligence. He replied, without any irony, "I didn't read it, but I wanted to know what was in it, so I asked AI to summarize it, and I read that." Now, just so you know, I read the encyclical, and I wrote this homily. Pope Leo has chosen the topic, "Safeguarding the Human Person in the Time of Artificial Intelligence." To open, he contrasts the biblical accounts of two construction projects: the Tower of Babel, built for individual profit, and Nehemiah restoring the walls of Jerusalem, built for the common good (10).

In developing technology, Pope Leo warns, "the guiding principle is not solely profit but the dignity of every person and the common good of all people" (81). Among harmful uses, he names "manipulation of information or violations of privacy. Yet there is also a subtler danger, for when AI systems present themselves as neutral and objective, they end up reflecting and reinforcing the stereotypes or ideological bias of their designers and developers" (102).

To help, he advises, "It is necessary to support the ongoing formation of teachers throughout their professional lives, so that they can engage positively with new technologies, helping students to use them responsibly, critically and creatively, rather than passively succumbing to their influence" (145).

He summarizes the risks, "how early and unsupervised exposure to digital devices and social media can negatively impact sleep, attention span, control of emotions and relationships, especially during the most vulnerable stages of life, at times with tragic consequences. This is further aggravated by easy access to violent or degrading content that offends sensibility, to pornographic and hypersexualized material, to messages that trivialize the body and emotions, and to proposals that normalize risky behavior.... Having a personal mobile device at too early an age and using it without adult supervision can exacerbate young people's vulnerabilities, foster addiction and expose them to isolation, bullying and cyberbullying, as well as to pressures to share intimate images or sensitive information" (141).

Instead, Pope Leo promotes relationships. "In an era that favors speed and fragmentation, the human person still yearns to receive care and recognition from attentive minds, kind words and hands capable of tenderness.... I invite everyone to cherish places and times where physical presence remains crucial, such as shared meals, Christian community gatherings, time spent with the lonely and serving the poor" (239). And lest you think there's nothing you can do, Pope Leo quotes J. R. R. Tolkien's character Gandalf: "It is not our part to master all the tides of the world, but to do what is in us for the succour of those years wherein we are set, uprooting the evil in the fields that we know, so that those who live after may have clean earth to till" (213).

At Mass today we heard the famous passage, "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life." Christ interprets life. Pope Leo writes, "We must lovingly safeguard the grandeur of humanity bestowed upon us and revealed in its fullness in Christ, the splendor of which no machine can ever replace." (15).