

Is Anybody Out There?

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Many years ago there was a made for TV movie about life in America after a nuclear attack by Russia. The movie was, as intended, very frightening. One of the scenes that sticks out prominently in my memory is where some college kids in a shelter in Lawrence Kansas broadcasting the question; "Hello? Is anyone out there?" The movie goes on to depict a very bleak and miserable future for the survivors, but the fear and loneliness of that call for someone's attention struck a deep emotional cord that still vibrates in my soul. I look around and see all about me the litter of destroyed families because of divorce, drugs and alcohol; I see generations of children who were raised without discipline raising their own children with no apparent parenting skills. I see abortion and euthanasia, genocide and almost every horror possible done to a human person all in the name of a cause or "justification." I want to scream: **"Hello? Is anybody out there? Doesn't anybody else see?"** I wonder if God might be screaming as well?

We live in a culture of noise. It seems that people can handle almost anything but quiet. The matter gets even worse if we expand the concept of noise beyond just that which causes vibrations in the ear. Noise is movement, Noise is color, and noise is demand. Noise interferes with our ability to hear. Noise distracts us from truth, insight and wisdom. It is not that I believe that there is nobody out there, but that people are so distracted by the Godless noise of society, that it is too difficult to hear the quiet whisper of the Holy Spirit. The TV movie, *The Day After* was intended to demonstrate that there really is no winner in a nuclear war, only initial survivors. But it seems to have worked like a "lightening bolt from above" because shortly afterwards, the U. S. and Russia began serious disarmament talks. Perhaps we are waiting for another "lightening bolt from above" before we begin to listen to the cry of a desperate world for Christians to live out that command to love God and love one another. What will it take to pull us away from our "private listening devices", "text messagers", e-mails, DVD's and other obstacles to interpersonal relationships?

I have absolutely no faith in the idea that God is calling fewer men and women into priestly and religious life than were called 100 years ago. I fully expect that as the population increases from one generation to the next, that God is actually calling more men and women to religious vocations. Still, in the Western, industrialized nations, especially the United States, fewer men and women seem to be responding to God's voice. It seems obvious to me that the reasons for this decline in vocations is quite varied and that these reasons did not happen overnight. Thus, any solution will take at least as long to turn around. Some people will quickly point to the recent "scandals" caused by a few priests, deacons and religious and others will suggest that it is either this or that. All of the above most certainly are contributing factors, but I don't believe that there is any single reason, but an agglomeration of issues responsible for the rapidly descending number of vocations to religious and priestly life. I give this *agglomeration of circumstances* the title of "*the social noise of self absorbs ion and self importance.*"

(I'm not picking on the Army, but their commercial slogans – Be All You Can Be! and An Army Of One... are indicators of our value on selfishness.) The Army did not create the culture of self-centeredness; the Army just recognized the value of it as a promotional tool for the Army. If we are ever going to change the course of the decline in priestly and religious vocations we need to begin to bring our children up to see a world larger than their own self-interest. I am completely convinced that the only successful way to do this is by examining our own tendency to act out of our self-interest. We won't be able to completely turn the world around, but we can become better examples of Christian love and servant hood to future generations. We can help bring about a sense of quietness in the world so that *those out there* are able to hear the call and find encouragement in answering "Yes, Lord!"