

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I was somewhat aware of the work of Charlie Kirk before his assassination last week, but to be better informed I watched some of his interactions with college young people. While many contend that he was controversial, it seemed to me that he was simply putting forward some values and truths that the vast majority of people would have considered basic truths only a few decades ago.

In the clips I viewed he came across as respectful, witty and a tough debater. No matter what your politics, I think there is one thing everyone can agree on: the sensible use of screen time. Charlie Kirk advocated a “screen Sabbath”. In other words, for one day of the week—for him it was Saturday—the phone went in a drawer, the computers and TVs were turned off and everyone in the family took a day off from gazing non stop at their screens.

I’m one of the guilty ones. My parish work and writing keeps me looking at the screens it seems non-stop. Here’s how it has affected me personally: I have a shorter attention span. I find it harder to concentrate on a good book. I find it easier to stimulate my mind by watching dumb stuff on social media. Furthermore, I’ve developed eye strain and back pain and wonder if that is because I’m looking at the screen too much.

The other deleterious effects in our society are worse. Not only is pornography instantly available, but the gaming subculture lures young men into an underworld that is emotionally and mentally unhealthy. Social media encourages gossip, rumors and insane conspiracy theories. Too much TV indulges the addiction to entertainment for entertainment’s sake. All of these factors lead us into a realm of unreality—and too much unreality makes us confused about our world, our relationships and ourselves.

So, as your pastor I’m advising you and your family to observe a “screen sabbath”. Take a day off from screen time. Parents, monitor your kids’ phone and screen use. The tablet, laptop and TV are NOT your best babysitters!

Instead build a prayer time. Read the scriptures. Spend time at Eucharistic Adoration and so focus on what is real. It’s called the “Real Presence” because that is where we find reality.

Your Pastor,
Fr. Longenecker