

P.S.

F2M

DURING THE COURSE of 2006 it is estimated that 900 million new mobile phones will be sold. Last year it was almost as many. A lot of these will go to emerging markets like China, India and Latin America. But many will go to the West. Even though it might seem that everyone already has one, people are still buying more, with penetration levels now going through one handset per capita in some areas. (I have no idea why that would be. One phone in each hand?! Two conversations at once?!)

This desire to stay connected, to be always and for ever in touch, shows no signs of abating. Handsets that clip on your ear so you can talk and do, handsets for the car, handsets with cameras, with MP3 players, with organisers, with games. Handsets for the grandparents, handsets for the kids. You have to be in the loop. You cannot miss that call.

Yet the ubiquity of the mobile phone has created its own social problems. Businessmen never leave the office. The poor train traveller is besieged by someone bellowing into a phone down the other end of the carriage. Concerts (and Bible talks!) are interrupted by bizarre ring-tones. Children are so busy texting their mates that it seems almost impossible ever to be able to communicate with them on a personal level. (Maybe my son would pay more attention if I texted him instead of speaking to him?!) And there are few things quite as irritating as going for lunch or for a coffee with someone who spends more time talking on their mobile (or excitedly tapping into it) than they do talking to you. What is the point? Everything in its place, but let's keep things in perspective.

Yet if the mobile phone has outgrown its welcome in some spheres of life, the fact remains that you cannot have too much mobile communication with God. The idea of being able to take your relationships and interactions with you wherever you go is a powerful one in a religious context. The notion of being in constant communication with *Him* is one which deserves reflection and which does not require a handset. Men and women have always been able to take God with them if they so choose; the lines are always open, and He never hangs up. Only we do that.

If you are the sort of person who doesn't like being separated from your mobile phone because

it makes you feel out of touch and disconnected, then think about what this would mean in a spiritual dimension, and let it impact your communication with the Lord. To be out of touch with God and disconnected from Him really would be a serious matter. He sees and knows all that we do, and yet often we metaphorically leave our mobiles at home (or in the ecclesial hall), and imagine that He is not available for access at other times. No doubt we could all benefit from talking to Him more.

Back in the world of telecoms, one of the things the phone companies are most worried about is fixed (F) to (2) mobile (M) substitution, or F2M for short. It refers to the phenomenon of people using their mobiles instead of using their fixed landline at home, with the result that landline traffic and revenue goes down. In some emerging markets where 'phones for all' is still a relatively new concept, companies are not even bothering to install fixed lines into people's homes. They just go straight to mobile.

The F2M phenomenon has a wonderful spiritual counterpart. It involves our developing from a form of communication with God which is done at fixed times and locations, almost like a set-piece (in the ecclesia, or before meals, or before bed), into the realisation that we need not be limited to these occasions (as if attached to a wire), but may speak to our Maker far more frequently. To be more conscious of God *all the time*, and actively to take Him with us *wherever we go*. To move from a dial-up connection (changing the metaphor to an internet one!) to an 'always on' connection. Every moment is precious. Precious enough to share with God.

Nehemiah's on-the-job prayer while in the court of the king is justly famed, both as an example of the power of the ever-present possibility of instant communication, and as a testament to the extent to which it is possible to make contact with God an automatic response to whatever happens. Stress or no stress, life can provide many little triggers to get in touch with Him. That way, life becomes more and more like an open dialogue with God, a life and a journey shared. As the world's largest mobile phone company has it: 'It's good to talk'. They just failed to specify Whom it's best to talk to.

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