

## The Joys of Tech Asceticism: On Staying Human

Peter Mommsen

Elon Musk, the man who started four billion-dollar tech companies, is worried that computers are on course to kill us. As he told an audience at MIT in 2014, “With artificial intelligence, we are summoning the demon.” In his nightmare, a future super-intelligent machine will outwit and then eliminate humankind. Accordingly, Musk is working on plans to colonize other planets in case we, or the artificial minds we create, make human survival on Earth impossible....

**Nobody wants to return to a tech-free world of surgery without anesthetics.**

Stung by the backlash, technophiles point to technology’s achievements: What about the myriad ways it has reduced misery and enhanced the quality of human life? What about the printing press and electric lights and antibiotics and instant

global communication and cancer drugs?

It’s a valid point. No one, from Apple engineers to Amish farmers, wants to return to a tech-free world of fifty-percent child mortality and surgery without anesthetics. Still, this doesn’t provide much reassurance when new technologies are rewiring the brains of today’s children and will likely soon be used to edit the genomes of those to be born. We’re living in a radically new situation. How do we stay human?

The New Testament uses a range of names for spiritual powers, among them *daimonia*: “demons.” It’s an awkward word. Yet in view of Silicon Valley’s fascination with transhumanism and rationalist ideology, to speak here of demons may be all too apt. Recognizing that uncanny forces lurk within technological structures doesn’t require us to flee the Information Age. But it does mean Christians must stop pretending that technological products are just neutral tools.

The example of social media proves the point. Sean Parker, a founding president of Facebook, recently admitted in an interview that Facebook was designed to be addictive, adding, “God only knows what it’s doing to our children’s brains.” Actually, even without special revelation, we already know: studies of teenagers show a strong correlation between heavy social media use and anxiety, depression, and suicide... This is not what human flourishing looks like.

For Christians, mental health risks are not the only concern. In Christ’s service we are pledged to spend all our energies doing good to our flesh-and-blood neighbors, building up a living symbol of his coming kingdom here on earth in community with others. This calling is incompatible with spending hours in thrall to a screen, not-quite-voluntarily chasing the next dopamine hit.

More often than not, then, the best social media policy is also the simplest: abstinence. Even those with strong reasons to post and tweet need to set themselves firm guidelines. A good rule, for example, is to avoid social media outside of work hours, especially since many of us have young children at home.

When it comes to children, tech abstinence is hardly a fringe idea. Steve Jobs famously refused to give his kids tablets or smartphones; the abundant benefits of a screen-free childhood are widely acknowledged. More ominously, evidence is mounting of the long-term damage caused by internet pornography. In the face of this insidious horror, deciding to keep one’s children offline is not a tough call. Yes, it’s easier said than done, and may require changes to lifestyle and spending patterns, switching schools, or even moving. But to a Christian parent, does any other value outweigh the soul of a child? And life offline can be fun.

The joys of abstinence need not be restricted to new technologies, either. Here’s to the day when having a TV in the family living room will be as disreputable as having a cigarette-butt-strewn ashtray is now.

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sentimental technophobia. The Luddites’ message was straightforward: people come before machines and profits. Surely that’s a slogan that both social-justice progressives and traditional conservatives can make their own.

This is the truth at the center-piece of Pope Francis’s encyclical *Laudato si’*. Economists may mutter about what they call the Luddite fallacy, but the “people first” principle stands.

Voice such ideas, and sooner or later you’ll be called a Luddite. Rather than reject the label, then, perhaps we should rehabilitate it. The original Luddites of nineteenth-century England didn’t risk the gallows out of

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Streaming and Website [www.stmaryshaddingtonroad.ie](http://www.stmaryshaddingtonroad.ie) email: [info@stmaryshaddingtonroad.ie](mailto:info@stmaryshaddingtonroad.ie)

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Parish  
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Serving  
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the Family

Serving the City





## Celebrating 50 Years of Service

Recently our dedicated sacristan, **Joe Kelly**, marked fifty years of service here at St Mary's.

Joe's service has been immense and much appreciated particularly by parishioners who come to him regularly for the small things that keep a parish going and he maintain a real sense of community. While priests come and go, Joe is always there and ready to help in all these situations. He has served with five parish priests or administrators and more than twenty curates going back to 1968, seeing great changes over that time both in the parish and in society.

We are delighted to mark this occasion, to offer our deepest gratitude and to wish him and his wife, Clare every blessing into the future.

**SPECIAL PARISH COFFEE MORNING**  
**NEXT SUNDAY, November 4 after 11am mass**

### 'Living with Loss' Bereavement Information Evening

Thursday 1 November, 5.30-8.00pm at the Alex Hotel, 41-47 Fenian Street, Dublin 2. Niamh Fitzpatrick, sister of the late Captain Dara Fitzpatrick, will address the gathering and speak on the theme 'Living with Loss'. Admission is free. For more information, contact The Irish Hospice Foundation: [www.hospicefoundation.ie](http://www.hospicefoundation.ie)

### Diocesan Priesthood - Vocation Exploration Retreat:

The National Vocations Office is running an overnight "Come & See" retreat for Young men aged between 18 - 40 in Mount St. Anne's in Killenard, near Portarlinton. Starting at 6pm on Fri 23<sup>rd</sup> and concluding at 4pm on Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> November. Maybe you know some man in your parish that may be interested in exploring what is involved in becoming a priest and would like to find out more, without commitment or obligation. Perhaps if you do, you could bring this to his attention? For further information, email Deacon Eric Cooney in the National Vocations Office on: [info@vocations.ie](mailto:info@vocations.ie)

### St. Mary's Autumn Diary

November 3: Requiem Mass: Order of Malta, 3:00pm  
Remembrance Concert, Lassus Choir, 7:30pm  
November 4: Mass for the Deceased of the Past Year, 11:00am  
November 17: Remembrance Day Mass, 10:00am  
November 19: Pastoral Council Meeting, 5:45pm  
December 8: Feast of the Immaculate Conception  
December 9: St. Vincent de Paul Collection

## Concert of Remembrance 2018

A Unique Concert of Music, Poetry & Readings  
Commemorating the Centenary of the Armistice

featuring

# Lassus

directed by  
Dr Ite O'Donovan

Special Guests  
**Dawn Bradfield**  
**Mark O'Regan**  
**John Walsh (trumpet)**  
**Dr Paul McKeever (organ)**



St Mary's Church  
Haddington Road, D.4

Saturday, Nov. 3rd  
2018 at 7.30pm

In the sacred space of St Mary's Church renaissance, baroque and more recent choral compositions performed by Lassus will astound and inspire.



Memorial Plinth, St Mary's Church

Hosted by St Mary's Church.



Tickets €15, €10 (concessions)  
and €5 (students)  
Available on  
[www.dublinchoralfoundation.ie](http://www.dublinchoralfoundation.ie)  
and at the door.

Presented by Dublin Choral Foundation

## FAITH CONVERSATIONS 2018

Every Wednesday evening,

from 12 October-12 December, 6.30pm.

The Catherine McAuley Centre

### Masses and Confession

Sundays: Vigil, 6pm (Saturday), 9.30am, 11am, 5pm  
Croatian Community Mass 6.30pm  
Daily masses 10am and 12.40pm, Saturday 10am only  
-Rosary daily after 10am mass

Adoration Blessed Sacrament, Weds 10.30-12.40

### Church Collections

W/e 21<sup>st</sup> October 2018

1<sup>st</sup> Collection: €1,095

2<sup>nd</sup> Collection: €2,227 (Missions)

Weekday collections: €440

## Mass for the Deceased of the Past Year

Next Sunday, 4 November 11am

### This weekend's intentions

6pm, Kevin and Patricia Kelleher (Anniversary)  
11am, William and Christina Cullen (Anniversary)  
5pm, Teresa Mullery Gray (Anniversary)

### Masses on 3<sup>rd</sup> /4<sup>th</sup> November 2018.

6pm, Margaret, Thomas and Colm O'Reilly (Anniv)  
11am, Deceased of Lardner and Mathews families  
Deceased parishioners of the past year.  
5pm, Eddie Gribben recently deceased

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