

RENEWING REVERENCE: PART 2

In last week's column, I began a reflection on the loss of reverence in society today by suggesting that we can trace the roots of this problem to a loss of respect and a loss of a sense of the sacred. Last week, I reflected on the loss of respect. This week, I will reflect on a loss of a sense of the sacred.

We respect, or honor through special words and gestures, those things that we consider worthy of such attention. As our values change, so too do the things that we respect, and we cease to respect things that we no longer value. Many people today no longer respect, or reverence, sacred things, because they don't value the sacred, and they don't value it because they have lost a sense of it.

The word "sacred" comes from the Latin word meaning "set apart" from the world and human purposes for the exclusive service of God and his purposes. Three fundamental beliefs underlie this concept of the sacred: first, God exists; second, God transcends, or exists beyond, his creation; and third, despite God's transcendence of creation, we can encounter and interact with him in and through creation. If we lose any of these fundamental beliefs, we lose a sense of the sacred.

Sadly, many people today have done precisely that. Each year it seems a new survey comes out showing an increase in the number of people who don't believe in God. Even among those who do claim to believe, which remains a solid majority, an increasing number do not believe in God as traditionally understood by the major faith traditions. These so-called "nones" (due to checking the box "none" for religious affiliation on the surveys) believe in a God of their own creation. Some hold to a concept of God that is essentially an adult version of an invisible friend, one who, far from being beyond us, is simply a projection of our ideal selves who comforts us in times of trouble and makes no demands of us. Others hold to a concept of God that is so far beyond us he cannot be known, or, if he can, he has no relevance in the world or our daily lives, a sort of indifferent, cosmic clock maker who set the universe in motion and left us to our fate, and who again conveniently makes no demands of us. For people who don't believe in God or who believe in a god that is either not transcendent or not accessible, why would they set things apart exclusively for God's service? For a growing, increasingly influential segment of our society, the sacred makes no sense, has no value, and so deserves no respect.

Tune in next week for part 3 of RENEWING REVERENCE!