

Sr. Burns: Technology Doesn't Make Us Human

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The title of Sr. Helena Burns' afternoon workshop Thursday, Jan. 10, at the Gigs, Geeks & God (G3) conference at Our Lady of Lourdes in Milwaukee was "R U A Digital Catholic."

The fact is, being a digital Catholic is almost unavoidable, as many of those in attendance— mostly parish and archdiocese employees — could attest.

"How do we use media to be more human rather than less human?" Sr. Burns said. "We didn't always live in a digital world."

She said the first step was to use our mind, will and heart in pursuit of truth, beauty and goodness.

"Technology is not what makes us human; being more like Jesus makes us human," Sr. Burns said.

Between emails, texts and the ubiquitous nature of laptops and smartphones, it is getting more and more difficult to unplug.

"We know what screens are doing to young kids and it's not a pretty picture, but there is hope," Sr. Burns said.

She said the hope is that addiction to our screens (such as phones, tablets, computers and televisions) can be shaken by following the same steps we follow to break the chains of any addiction.

The irony is that during a technology conference, the sound wasn't working for the irreverent clips she played from her computer.

With her quick wit, she blamed Satan.

"Even if it wasn't him, he's done enough," Sr. Burns said.

Not only are we becoming a society that is addicted to our gadgets and the instant availability of feedback (such as texts, emails or social media likes), we have anything we want to view or gain knowledge of at our fingertips. Instantaneously.

Sr. Burns admitted she has done things in the past online that don't make her a "good" digital Catholic, such as watching content with a snarky or condescending tone, downloading pirated movies, making fun of celebrities and spending too much time online.

She said young people are surprised when she tells them that information, "but I tell them I had a good reason for every one of those things." She wasn't justifying her actions, just noting how easy it is for a nun to get caught in some of the dangers present online. She admitted to going to confession about her online behavior.

"We're not supposed to stay the same," Sr. Burns said. "We're supposed to get better. We're supposed to improve. We're supposed to be more like Jesus — practice virtue and become a better person. If we don't get our real life right, we can't get our online life right."



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