

The events described in today's Gospel cause us to think of the power of Jesus' touch. A woman touched his clothing and found healing. Then that quiet and intimate space—it was only Jesus, a mother, a father, and their twelve-year-old child, who seemed by every indication to be lying dead before them—St. Mark says Jesus touched the child, held her hand and spoke to her, telling her to arise: the power of Jesus' touch.

We live in an age where no one is allowed to touch anyone else. Much of it has to do with fear of litigation, the result of one person touching another inappropriately or against the other's will. To solve the problem, no one touches any one else. As one who was going through seminary during the priest sex-abuse scandals, we were promptly taught all the safe-environment practices. And I can recall being newly ordained and suddenly assigned to a parish with a school, and small children coming toward me with clear indications of hugging me, prompting fear in me, and feeling the need to assume a posture of defense.

While we need to be careful, to maintain appropriate and legal boundaries, I worry that our loss of contact stifles Jesus' ability to be alive in our interactions and care for each other and for others. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus touched people, and his touch remains important. But it's not just physical touch; we're so disconnected. It's not just fear of litigation, it's also the result of how we've structured the home, the life of the family, and all the things that keep us isolated—personal devices. It all undermines the domestic church, but also it keeps us from thriving as community—it stifles Jesus' healing touch.

Thinking about the twelve-year-old girl, and the need for touch, for contact, makes me think of a book I read recently by a woman named Jean Twenge, a professor of psychology at San Diego State University. Her most recent book is entitled *iGen*, as in 'internet-generation', referring to latest emerging generation, just as before there were *Millennials*, *Generation X*, *Baby Boomers*, etc. The *iGen* are, more or less, those born between 1995 and 2012, and one of the things that largely characterizes them is that they have grown up with a smartphone in hand and have no experience of a world without internet.

The book describes how this reality has radically changed teenagers' lives. Studies show that it affects teens in all demographics: poor, rich, those in the city, those in burbs, those in small towns. And in whatever ways it shows causes for concern, the author makes it clear, that it's not just '*the old ways are better*' nostalgia. To be clear, every generation presented causes for concern.

In fact, some of the marked changes we would regard as better. The *iGen* are less likely to be at parties (in part, because they are less interested in the independence that comes with obtaining a license and driving); they are less sexually active (because they are less likely to date); and less inclined to use drugs. *So, why this change in habits and behavior?* The studies indicate that it's because their social life—their time with friends—exists through their phone, each in their own bedroom, in isolation.

But the studies also show they are more psychologically vulnerable than previous generations. While technology is not the sole cause, teen depression and suicide have skyrocketed since 2011. Twenge says, "*It's not an exaggeration to describe the iGen as being on the brink of the worst mental-health crisis in decades. Much of this deterioration can be traced to their smartphones*" and social media.

A survey called, *Monitoring the Future*, has been given to high schoolers every year since 1975, asking questions to determine their happiness and how they spend their time. "*The results could not be clearer*", the author says, "*Teens who spend more than average time on screen activities are more likely to be unhappy, and those who spend more than average on non-screen activities are more likely to be happy*".

So what's the correlation? Why would smartphones and social media have this affect? For all their power to connect kids 24/7, they also increase the age-old problem of being left out and uninvited. It's said to be even more prevalent and having a more sever affect among girls—social media being the platform where *girls* are more inclined to bully.

While this is cause for concern, it's a larger issue than just smartphones and social media. And this disconnect is more than just an *iGen* problem. There has always been the experience of loneliness and causes for sadness, but maybe it's different now and maybe it's getting worse. The earliest Christian

communities—despite their disagreements or any misguided movements—seemed to have understood, in ways that we don't, the need to care for each other, to be connected.

*Have you lost contact? Are you missing opportunities to make Jesus known, to bring his love and healing? Who in this parish, aside from your family, knows that you care about them?* Real connection begins in the home, and yes, may involve some difficult and unpopular decisions. But this real connection—Jesus' touch, if you will—must continue among us in this room right now if we are to be an authentic Christian community. May it begin today by Jesus' touch that comes to us in his one bread, from which we all partake. Let us pray that it unites and heals us through him—true communion.

*This link takes you to an article—from which the above quotes come—and provides a good summary of Twenge's book: <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/09/has-the-smartphone-destroyed-a-generation/534198/>*