

Jean Twenge is an American sociologist who has several books in which she describes the social reality of the younger generation of Americans. Her books, *Generation Me* which describes the Millennial Generation and *IGen* which describes the lives of the super-connected kids who are finishing High School and entering University as this moment are both very interesting reads.

Now she co-authored a book, *The Narcissism Epidemic*, where she describes our culture as being sick with self-absorption. She claims that our culture with its undo attention with self-esteem, with success, with the need to be special, with image and celebrity has become sick with narcissism. And this disease is spreading its nefarious effects into many dimensions of life, relationships and family, materialistic consumption that we can't afford, educations, politics and so on.

One of the things she does in her books is to touch on things which are related to faith and church life. And she has some very good insights. In the *Narcissism Epidemic*. when she touches on volunteerism, philanthropy and religion she says that these pursuits are often tainted by self-absorption in our culture. Young people choose volunteer opportunities in order to pad their resumes. Celebrities will get on stage to give back by supporting some cause and on the same day will post pictures of an extravagant party with expensive champagne and all the bling. In both cases it's all about the scene, projecting the right image. It's all about me.

With regards to religion she will speak of the popularity of those churches which preach a prosperity gospel; God wants you to be rich. God didn't create you to be average; God wants you to succeed. God would not have put the dream in your heart if He had not given you everything you need to fulfill it". As she says every contestant on American Idol seems to believe even after Simon Cowell rips them apart because they stunk.

Our Old Testament reading from the prophet Amos, has describing his call as a prophet as a "Who me?" moment. I am but a herdsman, a dresser of sycamore trees. My prophetic role has nothing to do with me, but is entirely from God.

And in the Gospel, Jesus sends the Apostles to go preach, to heal, to do the work of God and they are to do so empty handed. Go without staff, go without bread, without money, without a change of clothes, go with nothing, go with nothing.

In addressing priests, Blessed Mother Theresa of Calcutta once gave these words of advice.

**"God cannot fill what is full, he can fill only emptiness — deep poverty, and your 'Yes' is the beginning of being or becoming empty. It is not how much we really 'have' to give, but how empty we are — so that we can receive fully in our life and let him live his life in us. **Take away your eyes from yourself and rejoice that you have nothing, that you are nothing, that you can do nothing. Give Jesus a big smile, each time your nothingness frightens you.**"**

Jesus sends us out and tells them to take nothing with us, no bread, money or spare clothes. But, also ourselves, as much as our culture would disagree that nothing also includes me.