

“Do not love the world or the things of the world... the world and its enticement are passing away” (1 Jn 2:15, 17).

When I grew up, we had a rotary dial phone attached to the wall. It was built to last. 50 years later when the family home was sold, the phone was still in perfect working order. Over the years my brothers and I tried to help move our parents along with the times. We gave them touch tone phones, phones with built in answering machines, wireless phones, and cell phones. After a while, these new digital phones needed to be replaced with something more up to date. When 4G became prevalent, the cell phone with 2G was no longer supported. Nothing worked as consistently and as solidly as the old rotary phone built to last. Which us brings us back to John’s 1st Letter. “Yet the world and its enticement are passing away.”

We live in a throwaway culture. Things are built for obsolescence. If it doesn’t work, oftentimes it is easier to buy something new than to try to fix something old. Our landfills are overflowing with items from our throwaway society. The sea is filled with plastic that causes great harm to the life of the sea. As we try to move faster and farther, we burn more fossil fuels and in large industrial cities have made the air quite unbreathable. Sadly, the way we treat objects overflows to the way we treat people.

Five centuries before the birth of Christ, Hippocrates developed an oath for physicians to apply their skills to heal people but never to do any harm. The Hippocratic oath specifically prohibited prescribing deadly drugs and protected life against abortion. The modern oath of today is a far cry from the time-tested version for thousands of years. With a weaker and at times ethically dubious oath, abortions are now routine, and physician assisted suicide has gained acceptance in many modern cultures around the world.

Language is an important part of every culture and maintaining traditions helps one to have a sense of identity and belonging. Many native languages throughout the world have become nearly extinct in the last five decades. With an ever-increasing pace of needing to change to keep up with the times, there has been an increasing emphasis on the passing things of this world at the expense of time-tested traditions. When these ancient traditions rooted in the wisdom of the ages fade away, there is not much solid ground left to stand on.

When John originally wrote his letters for the people he ministered to, he contended with individuals who wanted to throw the Gospel away for a false belief system. “The purpose of the letter is to combat certain false ideas, especially about Jesus, and to deepen the spiritual and social awareness of the Christian community. Some former members of the community refused to acknowledge Jesus as the Christ and denied that he was a true man” (1 Jn Introduction).

John stressed the fundamental truth of the faith. Jesus is real. He sacrificed his life on the cross to help us understand what authentic love is all about. Jesus taught us that our love of God must overflow into a love for our neighbor and a care for all that he has entrusted to us. In John’s own words, “What we have seen and heard we proclaim now to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; for our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We are writing this so that our joy may be complete” (1 Jn 3-4).

Joy and happiness will not come from the passing things of this world. In our consumer society, no technology or new idea ever satisfies. We are always hungering for more. Only God offers us lasting joy. The things that are eternal satisfy us. Truth, beauty, and goodness sustain us. Time tested traditions sewn into the fabric of culture help us to find meaning and purpose in life. Let us recall the words of Jesus, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid” (Jn 14:27).