



As fairly new homeowners (it's been 1.5 years), one struggle that my husband and I have is that of finding a right balance with how much stuff *we possess*. *Our goal: not to possess too little stuff (we're not hardcore minimalists) and not to possess too much stuff (we still want breathable and livable space).*

Moving from small apartments in the city to a larger house in the suburbs, I wonder this: why does the pendulum mostly swing to having more? I speculate that, as Millennials growing up in suburban America in the 90s and 00s, we were subconsciously and unwillingly influenced us to see the "McMansion," chock-full of stuff, as a sign of a life well-lived. *Yet as the days tick by as homeowners, I see how empty spaces in our home are precisely where our "easy breathing" and most cherished prayer time and deep thinking occur.*

We underestimate how much we actually have and we overestimate how much we actually need. Indeed, some of our happiest times as a married couple and family have been when we're literally living out of suitcases! When we are visiting family in either California or New York, or traveling elsewhere for vacation, we have very little stuff, but our hearts are so full and our days are so wonderful. We have just what we need to survive and to enjoy just... being.

It all sounds quite Zen Buddhist, and it probably is. **However, as a Catholic, I have come to realize that the concept of minimalism is very much Catholic as well!** If you think about the most fervent prayer warriors in our Faith, monks and nuns who live in secluded communities dedicated to prayer throughout the world!!, what do they possess and need? The following are just my layperson speculations...:

- A few sets of clothes for protection from the elements.

- Bread and water on which to physically subsist. Food and drink.

- The Bread of Life (the Eucharist!) and the Living Water on which to spiritually subsist.

- Holy Scripture, the Liturgy of the Hours, and other sources of spiritual reading (hymnals, too!) with which to pray.

- Other necessary literature, including that for leisure and personal growth.

- Pen and paper for personal writings and communications. (Tablet? Smart phone? Or daresay a laptop?)

- A bed to sleep, a chair to rest, a desk to ponder. (Ikea minimalist furnishing will do!)

- A kitchen, a bathroom, a sink. (Likely all communal in their case.)

- Medicine and toiletries. (Even monks and nuns gotta floss!)

- Sacramentals, such as a rosary, a crucifix, and holy water. Most of these are likely worn on their habit (religious garb) 24/7!

–A few other items of beauty (i.e. flowers or paintings on the wall), sentimentality (i.e. pictures of family and letters from friends) and recreation (i.e. a bike or a basketball– hey, nuns playing basketball at the convent? I'm sure it happens!).

–Coffee and tea. Our spiritual brothers and sisters gotta get their day going, too!

–Beer! (Our monks make it best, right?! No. Seriously!!)

I know this list isn't exhaustive, but it's an honest attempt! Taking vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, monks and nuns are able to develop their "poverty of spirit" when they live a materially minimalist life. Our Church, the Body of Christ, saw this benefit thousands of years ago, and we looked to Christ for this model. Even He had no place to rest His head. He told His disciples to go from town to town with nothing but the sandals on their feet, the cloak on their back, and a walking stick, healing the sick and proclaiming the Good News.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines describes a "poverty of heart" quite beautifully: "Jesus enjoins his disciples to prefer him to everything and everyone, and bids them to 'renounce all that they have' for his sake and that of the Gospel" (CCC #2544). And, quite simply, the Catechism goes on to define "poverty of spirit" as "voluntary humility" (CCC #2546). When we practice voluntary humility– detachment from ourselves and from earthly goods– we have more energy to place towards living out the Gospel and figuratively bringing it to all the ends of the earth.

Further alluding to several Scripture verses, the Catechism (CCC #2547) also summarizes: "The Lord grieves over the rich, because they find their consolation in the abundance of goods. Let the proud seek and love earthly kingdoms, but blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven. Abandonment to the providence of the Father in heaven frees us from anxiety about tomorrow. Trust in God is a preparation for the blessedness of the poor. They shall see God." Being detached from ourselves, our egos, and our things, we have more capacity to be attached to Our Lord, to people, and to experiences. In fact, the Gospel says that we can even see God more clearly when we aren't hampered down by things! And isn't this what– rather, isn't this Who and who– matter most?: Who we will be with Heaven, and the people who we will take to Heaven

with us?

Let us therefore work on acquiring non-earthly goods and riches, such as deep relationships, growth in virtues, and the spreading of good works and deeds. Let us work on flourishing in our respective vocations in life, which ultimately leads to the salvation of our souls!

As I think about what monks and nuns need, and how much stuff from which they are detached, I can't help but wonder what I need personally and what my family needs. How can minimalism help myself and my family to de-clutter our home and our spirits as well? How can minimalism help to re-energize myself and my family in all aspects of our lives— including the evangelical element of being Catholic?

As Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton once said, may we: “Live simply, that others may simply live.” As a fellow millennial trying to minimize, what's on your list of necessities? How can YOU make like a monk or a nun in YOUR life?

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