Sources of Information and Inspiration

We're living in a world-full of uncertainty and concern, and at a time when there are endless means of acquiring and sharing information from a myriad of 'chat' platforms; they appear to offer free-and-easy means by which to 'keep in touch' with potentially vast numbers of 'followers', not just chosen ones…

Now much is being bandied round about the advantages, disadvantages and dangers of the world's insatiable obsession with social media and AI. We're already experiencing their ability to, respectively, flood us with information and to find 'answers' to 'questions' posed by us (pretty much instantaneously).

It must be said, though, that AI has provided tangible benefits to, for example, to the way hospitals conduct examinations, operations; and even in the design of drugs and treatments for all sorts of things. My concern being, not so much AI per se (which is benign), but the uses to which it can be put. Because the algorithms that make it all 'work' are designed by fallible human beings, some of whom are far from benign their intentions!

In my view, the 'issues' we'll be facing (ethical, moral, political, practical and scientific) are nothing at all to do with the already-extensive use of social media and AI as sources of information, communication and inspiration. But our reliance on it all to be accurate, and 'the truth'…

Changing the subject slightly, I was 'moved' to say something this time about valid (or invalid) sources of information in the search for 'truth' - particularly in the context of many conversations I've had, over many years, with people who have doubts about the Bible, as a reliable and source of truth (and personal 'inspiration') that's relevant today.

Believe me, I do understand the arguments that are usually levelled - that the biblical texts span thousands of years, and the New Testament is now 2000 years old (so to speak), and 'out of date'…

Thought for the Week: They miss the point - that it's not the historical facts of those times that are what the Bible is about - it's the messages, within the texts, that need to be carefully discerned. Indeed,

Roger's introduction to reading the Bible (in the context of Home Worship Resources that I continue to 'publish' weekly) says this: ***It helps to read Scripture slowly and prayerfully; let a particular phrase or sentence call to you, and spend some time reflecting on what it might mean for you, this Sunday.***

So where does AI figure in this context? Well in more recent conversations (typically with friends, family and parishioners), I've been asked whether or not I use social media and AI, as a matter of routine, in my ministry? And the answer to that is, inevitably, 'yes'. Even when using Wikipedia to research 'stuff' (including facts that may appear in weekly homilies, for example), the first (rapid) response on the laptop is generated by AI; no escaping it…

But as Roger said about reading the Bible, the same care needs to be given to how we assess the accuracy and relevance of what we are told via social media and by AI. We need to take a step back from what we read, in order to make our own minds up. We therefore let The Holy Spirit help us to come to our own conclusions and decisions that are relevant to us, as individuals, here and now.

On a personal note - I simply cannot bring myself to ask AI to generate content for prayers and homilies. That said, none of us can second guess the absolute accuracy of social media posts, nor the source of the content we may come across generated by AI. But having studied the content, we must 'listen-out', carefully, to what the Holy Spirit has to say (within), and pray that we subsequently use that information sensitively, with care, and in the right context…

Social media and AI can only inform us; we have to let the Holy Spirit then inspire us on what we say and do as a result.