



It was both amusing and depressing at the same time. I was scrolling through my Facebook newsfeed the other day and ran upon a photo that made me laugh. It depicted a formal place-setting for a holiday table. It detailed where each utensil and particular plate should be placed. Finally, it depicted where the diner's cell phone should be placed. If you're wondering, it's just to left of the bread plate, above the napkin.

It really did make me laugh because I was one of those young adults who came of age not knowing which side the napkin belonged or that you start from the outside fork and work your way in. But at the same time it made me shake my head because I know there is a great deal of truth behind the humor. I suspect at many holiday tables in the next few weeks, cell phones will be well represented.

Let's face it, we've all seen it. In fact, it's become commonplace in restaurants of every ilk. A family of four sitting together, enjoying a meal together after a long week of work and school. And every head is bowed, but not in prayer. No, every head is bowed, engrossed in the smart phone on the table in front of it. There is no conversation. No interaction. No coming together as a family. It is simply four people sharing a common space, and little else.

At this point in an argument, I often admit that I am exaggerating a bit to make a point. But not this time. Because I see that same scene all the time. And it depresses me. My kids are mostly grown. Melissa and I are teetering on the edge of an empty nest. And so family dinners – when all of us are together – are not an everyday occurrence. And so that makes them precious. I think back over the past 25 years or so, and some of my best memories revolve around meals that we shared as a family. And I don't remember what we ate or drank. What I remember is the conversation. The laughter. And the fact that we were fully present with one another.

And in the end, I think that is the greatest gift one person can give to another – to be fully present. I tell another human being, you are important enough to me for me to give you my undivided attention. To affirm to you that, in this moment, you mean more to me than anything else. Likewise, the converse is true. To be in conversation with someone while scrolling through Facebook or Instagram is to communicate insult of the highest order. Whether we intend it or not, it demeans them. It tells them that

we would rather be doing something else. It communicates that they are not worthy of our time. It dehumanizes them.

And so my challenge to you this holiday season is to give the gift of presence. Whether gathered around the table, around the tree, or just around, choose to be fully present with those with whom you are sharing time and space. Be mindful that a text received does not have to be a text immediately answered. And that the people you are with are probably more important to you than the people posting on social media.

Give the gift of presence. Because presence is the foundation of relationship.

See you Sunday.