

Welcome to the High Plains Preacher! Stories about the Bible, high wind, fast horses, lack of moisture and other elements of life in the Texas Panhandle

Virtual Reality

by Father Jim Schmitmeyer

Welcome to the High Plains Preacher, stories about the Bible, high wind, fast horses, lack of moisture and other elements of life in the Texas Panhandle. I'm Fr. Jim.

A company named Diageo is using virtual reality to convince people not to drink and drive and they are doing it in a way never done before: virtual reality. Through the use of virtual reality, viewers get to experience what it's really like to be in an accident caused by drunk driving. The experience lasts about 4 minutes and the story that it tells does not have a happy ending.

I don't know if I would be willing to put myself through an experience like that. But that concept of using of virtual reality to transform your behavior made me contemplate how the experience of deep prayer accomplishes the same thing.

Let's take the scene of the Crucifixion as an example. What would it be like to experience this scene in virtual reality? Imagine slipping on a headset with the name St. Dismas printed across the front. If don't recognize the name, Catholic tradition has given the name St. Dismas to the good thief who was executed on the cross next to Jesus.

So, imagine the experience of being tied to the cross in place of St. Dismas. You see the sky turn dark, hear the jeering of the crowd, feel the splinters in the wooden plank pressed against your back. Then, when you can't take any more of the pain, you look at Jesus and you hear yourself say, "Remember me, Lord, when you come into your Kingdom!"

Now, let's say that you've taken a friend with you on this virtual trip to Calvary. But your friend grabs a different headset, not that of St. Dismas, but of the other thief. Your friend enters into the same virtual reality, experiences the same sounds and sensations of Calvary. But, in the end, he curses Jesus, saying, "Do something! If you are the messiah, get me off this cross!"

What caused one thief to believe in Christ and the other to write him off? The answer is not found in virtual reality, but inner reality! For St. Dismas, it was the recognition that God himself was entering into human death to deliver us from eternal death.

One thief yelled, "Get me off this cross!" The other one said, "Take me with you! Take me into your agony, so as to take me into your glory."