

Taking out the trash

One of the best purchases we made for our rectory in recent years was the purchase of a commercial paper shredder. Of all the office staff, I use it the most and get the most enjoyment out of it.

Every few months, irrespective of the season, I go on a spring cleaning binge, even when it is not spring. I derive a great satisfaction from collecting all the letters, paperwork and stuff I had kept in case I might need them. Finally, their expiration date passed and I was ready to confine them to the bowels of our paper shredder.

There are certain things I have no hesitation in feeding the hungry shredder as soon as the mail carrier delivers them. The first ones to get my attention are the catalogues. They receive high priority. What is most frustrating is that we receive several copies of the same catalogue on the same day monthly. One famous one is one called "Oriental Trading." We usually receive three or four copies of the same, with slight different addresses and "occupant" seeker. Close to the address, I notice that there is a request to the Postmaster to have the catalogues delivered between a certain designated day time frame. Immediately, on receiving the catalogues, I just lump them together and head to our catalogue crunching machine. I turn on the machine and I hear its anxious purr as it readies its empty stomach to be filled. The machine will shred bundles of paper up to twenty pages at a time. I love to hear its sounds as it masticates its food with determination, conviction and appreciation.

Following catalogues, bulk mailing letters receive the next highest priority. I don't even open them. They find their way to the shredder immediately and are turned into chaff.

Another group that gets my attention are the pre-approved credit card offers with their fake credit card inside. My shredder seems very happy to rip up would-be credit cards in order to protect me from any euphoric experience I may gain from using them to purchase a wish item.

I did make the mistake one time of feeding a begging letter that had included a nickel inside its envelope. As I fed it through the shredder, my machine developed indigestion immediately and refused to work. It was as if it were saying to me, "What are you doing shredding money?" after some delicate surgery to remove the splintered pieces of the nickel, we were back in business again. Obviously, I never made that same mistake again.

Maybe my love affair with our shredder needs to be monitored. Maybe there is a certain part of my personality that has a destructive streak. Yet, on the other hand, maybe I realize that the things one surrounds oneself does not make the person. Instead, relationships help define the person.

I notice that one of the TV channels has a show about hoarders; how their homes become a slimy garbage dump that has built up over the years and needs destruction and fumigating. I think that my love relationship with the shredder affirms the fact that I have little chance of becoming a hoarder.

Obviously, hoarders surround themselves with comfort things that end up stinking and polluting their lives and relationships.

It seems we begin to hoard and keep things "just in case" we might need them in the future some time. Instead, we become "pack rats" instead of shredder feeders.

The late comedian, George Carlin had a routine about "stuff." We collect stuff, keep stuff, spread out stuff to every place we live and visit. We do this in order that we might have stuff no matter where we are or where we plan to go. There is always stuff available to stroke and affirm our insecurity.

I don't have to worry about this column self-destructing. I am not making a paper copy of it. Yet, I know our shredder will be disappointed. I hope it understands.

The mail person just delivered our mail. I must check and see what I can feed to the hungry shredder. Then I will check the contents of its colorful confettied belly and head off to take out my light trash.