

Column

An oldy-goldy American hymn is “Count your blessings, name them one by one.” No doubt spiritual blessings should be high on everyone’s list, but why not more mundane things? In view of the warm and humid temperatures of the past few weeks, why not – for example – pencil in ‘air conditioning’?

Air conditioning has not always been universal. The White House did not get a comprehensive, building-wide cooling system until the Truman renovation which took place between 1948 and 1952.

Into the 1960s, air conditioning was often used as an enticement for businesses to draw in trade. For example, I remember as a boy going with my parents to a restaurant that had on its plate-glass window a decal with a picture of a pack of Alpine cigarettes and the words “Come in, it’s air cooled.”

Hotels, motels and theatres would likewise include in their advertisements the words “Air

conditioned.” Now, of course, if you checked into a hotel and found your room without air conditioning, you would be out before you put down your suitcases.

In the same period, homes often lacked this amenity. The house in which I grew up was built in the 1920s and had an attic fan which sucked in air from the outside through open windows. In the summer, it would be hot air, but at least you got a breeze. And then there were porches, which offered a place of escape and relative comfort. A memory from my youth was every member of the family sitting on the front porch as the sun went down shelling peas or butter beans and talking . . . no cell phones in those long-gone days.

Nostalgia cast aside, I remember a few nights a year when your mattress felt like a heating pad. It was miserable. The only cooling you had was a buzz fan on a dresser aimed in your direction. It didn’t do much, but it was something.

Some of my friends did live in houses which had air conditioning, usually a Fedders unit in a window.

The downside was that these small post-war houses had no front porch, which meant they had no place to shell peas and beans and talk!

Schools in those days were likewise largely without air conditioning. At least in the first few weeks in September, classrooms could be brutal. The same was true in colleges. When I would take classes in the summer, I would pick ones that met early in the morning to avoid the extreme heat.

Of course, now all that has changed. Most of us, unless working outside, operate in climate-controlled environments. It helps us to be more efficient and better tempered. Yet, most of the time, we take it for granted . . . that is, until the system goes down.

Blessings come in all shapes and sizes. At the top of the list should certainly be spiritual ones, those which flow from God's grace. If we are Christians, through the sacrifice of Christ once offered, our past mistakes have been scrubbed away. We have been given a new slate on which to write life's story. We have help for today and hope for tomorrow. All of these are of inestimable value.

Go ahead and count your blessings. You will be surprised what the Lord has done, but let's not get too 'spiritual'. Why not, on a sultry summer day, throw in air conditioning?

LET thy merciful ears, O Lord, be open to the prayers of thy humble servants; and, that they may obtain their petitions, make them to ask such things as shall please thee; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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