

Connected Amid the Quarantine

In Italy, the coronavirus has caused a lot of suffering as well as a lot of boredom. Some young people are connecting electronically to support one another during these exceptional circumstances.

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"A feeling overwhelms us all these days: boredom, an absurd boredom, we are dying of boredom ...". Thus begins a voice message that Lorenzo,

a young man from Rome, sent two days ago to his friends.

Since the national authorities advised it, thousands of young Italians have had to remain at home, without going to school or university and without going outside, to avoid getting and spreading COVID-19, also known as coronavirus.

Along with possible health risks, this virus has brought about other changes: losing the rhythm of study, interrupting contact with friends, succumbing more easily to laziness.

"We have so much time on our hands and we don't know how to fill our day," Lorenzo continued. "Why don't we do all those activities that we have always dreamed of doing? Like learning to play the guitar, daring to learn a new language, read that interesting book that we have been saying we would read for years..."

"As usual, the problem is a lack of willpower," admits Lorenzo. "We can't do it alone. We need someone to support us and encourage us..." This is how the King Midas Project initiative was launched, thanks to which young people who attend a center of Opus Dei in Rome help one another to achieve their goals, connected via WhatsApp.

This is how it works. Each person decides what activities they want to do: for example, finish a book, learn a song on the piano, do some physical training, start a blog... Then, everybody names another friend who is knowledgeable in this area to be their coach, which involves following the person daily online, helping them to set goals for the day, giving them some advice and evaluating the person's effort with a score.

"Marco suggested that I could better distribute my study and leisure time," Giacomo explains, "because otherwise I get tired too easily. By frequently changing activities, one becomes less bored. So, in addition to studying, I have decided to write a play."

"When you know that you are not alone, that there are other people who expect you to do your best, it is easier not to give up or to give in to laziness," says Filippo.

"Band of brothers"

Meanwhile, another group of young people who frequent an Opus Dei center in Genoa, have also agreed to make the most of this situation.

Through WhatsApp, they have developed a schedule together, so that everyone can follow it at the same time from their homes.

The schedule suggests getting up at 8, eating breakfast, getting ready, and then spending a few minutes in prayer. This is followed by studying until the middle of the morning, when whoever wants to can do some push-ups or call a friend. After lunch, it's time to read a book... and so the day goes on. At night, they do a video call all together to discuss the day's events.

They call their plan "Band of Brothers," after the famous line from Shakespeare as well as the well-known television series. "We try not to abandon anyone, and want to live the communion of saints more closely in spite of the distance," says Pietro.

Caring for the spiritual life

"Are you all connected? Shall we start?" These days, Luca sits in front of his computer screen at 3:15 on the dot. But he's not there to surf the web

or to play *Fortnite*, but rather for another activity: to pray the rosary together with some of his friends.

“This helps us to pray for so many people who are suffering from the coronavirus, those who are experiencing the loneliness of quarantine or who are afraid. We don't want to leave them alone,” Luca explains.

Meanwhile, on Thursday afternoon in Milan, there was a meditation that could be followed electronically. The Italian Episcopal Conference has prohibited Masses and it is not easy to go to the churches to pray, but it is always possible to pray from home, and with even more reason in these exceptional circumstances.

“We begin our prayer today,” Fr. Armando begins. With a computer, he records his preaching in the chapel, and twenty young people follow his words from their homes.

They pray together for those affected by the coronavirus. Then each one on their own reads from a spiritual reading book and they meditate on what they have heard and read.

A totally unusual situation requires exceptional measures. In many ways, boredom is also a virus that must be combated. Doing so with the help of friends makes it a lot easier.

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