

Family Pilgrimages To Our Lady Amid the Pandemic

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This month, we are celebrating one year of our online project called *Pilgrimages to Our Lady*. My family and I launched it on May 24, 2020 to commemorate the feast of Mary,

Help of Christians. This month, to celebrate our first anniversary, we will be dedicating our online pilgrimage to Mary, Help of Christians once again, asking her for an end to the pandemic, in line with Pope Francis' plea. <https://opusdei.org/en-ph/article/a-marian-month/>

The Philippine government declared a strict community quarantine on the island of Luzon in March 2020. It was the first of a series of declarations that eventually covered the entire country. Mass gatherings were prohibited and religious activities were suspended. Like everyone else, my family was stuck at home. We couldn't even visit our parish church, which is a 5-minute walk away.

Quarantine for our family meant working and studying from home. Hearing Mass was limited to synchronous online attendance. On

the brighter side, the lockdown gave us an opportunity to be together at mealtimes, have regular get-togethers after lunch, engage in daily physical exercise, and pray the Holy Rosary as a family after supper.

The quarantine prevented us from doing what many Catholic families would traditionally do during the month of May: a pilgrimage to a shrine or place dedicated to Our Lady. St. Josemaría Escrivá encouraged this custom as a sign of love and affection for the Mother of God.

During one of our family meals, we came up with the idea of developing an online platform that would allow families to do the May pilgrimage amid the lockdown. This gave birth to “Pilgrimages To Our Lady” <https://www.facebook.com/PilgrimagesToOurLady>, a Facebook page that live-streams a pre-recorded

Marian pilgrimage every first Saturday of the month at 5PM, Philippine Standard Time (UTC+8).

The pilgrimage project has a core of 22 families. They would submit audio recordings of their families praying their assigned portions of the rosary accompanied by a high-resolution family photo. We were overwhelmed to see that hundreds ended up watching and praying the Holy Rosary during our Saturday live streams.

These pilgrimages involve praying all four mysteries of the Holy Rosary (Joyful, Luminous, Sorrowful, and Glorious). Each mystery features a Marian shrine with a short narration of its history and other interesting facts. Images of the place simulate a visit to that shrine. We have featured shrines from all over the world. The participating families and viewers have given positive feedback on the

cultural inputs and the images. Some are planning to visit those shrines when the pandemic is over.

This activity allowed us to gain more friends in our neighborhood, something that we failed to do before the pandemic. One of our neighbors confided that it got his family to resume the daily recitation of the Holy Rosary together.

In October 2020, the month of the Holy Rosary, we invited to the online pilgrimage Bishop Jesse Mercado of Parañaque, Bishop Francisco de Leon of Antipolo, Opus Dei Regional Vicar Msgr. Carlos Estrada, and Fr Roque Reyes, chaplain in the University of Asia and the Pacific. Each gave a short reflection of the mysteries of Rosary, relating them to the four popular Marian shrines that were featured that day: Lourdes, Guadalupe, Fatima and Torreciudad. This was attended by more than 500

live viewers (not counting family members)

My family and I are pleased that the online pilgrimage has touched the lives of families in one way or the other. Here are some messages we received from participating families:

- *“We were thrilled at how many families can come together from around the world at once to pray.”*
- *“Participating in this pilgrimage gave us some time to ‘pause’, especially during this time of uncertainty, and an opportunity to reflect as a family as well.”*
- *“It has helped our children realize that there are also many families like us who pray the Rosary to keep their family together.”*
- *“I think we will have a better appreciation not only our daily Rosary but also all our daily prayers.”*

- *“We liked the opportunity to know the different Marian places. Also, having different people from different places taking part.”*
- *“I wanted my daughter to see that we are part of a bigger family. And that what we do as a family is what other families do.”*
- *“We hope to see more families joining the pilgrimage. We feel good when we see familiar places and faces praying the rosary.”*

What I like most about these online pilgrimages is hearing the voices of little children praying the rosary and trying to outdo each other. They are music to my ears!

It is moving to see how members of the same family living in different places or countries work out a plan to enable them to pray together despite physical separation and technological challenges. “This is a

very nice bonding activity for the family,” a participant commented.

One other thing I witnessed in these *Pilgrimages To Our Lady*: the communion of saints brought to life. During the live stream on Facebook, online participants often post their special intentions and ask for prayers. Mostly, they ask for protection of their families from the pandemic, healing of loved ones, the eternal repose of their beloved departed, and thanksgiving for God’s blessings.

In the words of one of the participants: “Our children are inspired to pray the rosary, seeing other families praying the rosary with them.”

Those who wish their family or others to lead the recitation of the Rosary may send an email request to *pilgrimestoourlady@gmail.com*

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