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In Macau: "We learned to adapt as a family"

Monica talks about how she and her family have learned to adapt to pandemic restrictions in Macau, in southern China, and to thank God for all his small daily gifts.

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Since the beginning of February, almost everyone in Macau has been working and studying from home. The coronavirus pandemic has

changed our way of life, as it has that of many other people.

My husband Miguel and I settled in Macau years ago, and we now have two children: Matilde, who is nearly 13 years old, and Miguel, who is 10. I met Opus Dei through a friend I got to know when our children started catechism classes in the cathedral in 2017. At that time I realized I needed to deepen my doctrinal formation, and my friend invited me to classes in a center of Opus Dei. Later I started attending recollections as well, and late last year I became a cooperator of Opus Dei. Before the pandemic restrictions, I had been trying to attend weekday Mass whenever possible, because Holy Communion is always a source of peace and strength for me.

The churches in Macau had to close for an indefinite period starting on February 6, and we couldn't receive

Holy Communion. Before this, in addition to daily Mass, I also tried to find time to pray before the Blessed Sacrament in a chapel near my office. When I wasn’t able to, I felt empty.

God is our Father and is always in control. It wasn't long before we had online Masses, retreats, novenas, and other activities that helped us continue to live our faith. Those moments of prayerful silence made all the difference. They enabled me to accept the pandemic as a way to help me grow in my faith. Now I look forward to these virtual events and am much more grateful for the little everyday things I used to take for granted.

We have learned to adapt as a family. We continue to attend Sunday Mass as if we are really in the church, and help each other to finish breakfast in time to fulfill the hour-long

Eucharistic fast we would do if we were receiving Holy Communion. We light a candle and place a crucifix beside the TV during the Mass. We learned the prayer of spiritual communion that our parish prays, and my friend also shared with me the spiritual communion that St. Josemaria liked to pray. I think we are learning to appreciate the deep value of spiritual communions.

We also worked together to come up with a schedule for the children, since they are at home and my husband and I both work. In this schedule, Matilde and Miguel try to find time to study, use the internet, exercise, and pray.

Our family life has benefited from the situation. We spend more time talking calmly together, and since the children don't need to get up as early for school, we don't have to rush bedtime. We have time to ask each

other what we have done that day, do an examination of conscience, share something we are grateful for, and say a prayer of thanksgiving. Although it means going to bed a little later, the quality time we spend together makes it worthwhile. When the children go back to school, we will look for ways to continue this new custom.

We have also started to pray the Rosary as a family after dinner. At first it wasn't easy to get the children to do it, but later they made the commitment on their own and learned to set aside time to pray. We share our intentions as we pray, and my daughter Matilde checks the news in different countries so we can pray for those who are sick or have died of coronavirus.

Little Miguel has started to be more attentive and understands more about the importance of prayer. I

have a cough allergy and sometimes cannot stop coughing, and he asks me now if I'm okay.

We take turns announcing the mysteries of the Rosary as we pray. One night my husband fell asleep after a tough day, as did Matilde because she had gotten up early to finish an assignment. And I too fell asleep. It was my turn to lead the prayer, and when I woke up I found Miguel praying the Rosary alone. I asked him if he had announced the mystery, and he told me that it was my turn; but since I had fallen asleep, he said, “someone has to say the mystery, so I did it for you.”

Thanks be to God, after a few months with the churches closed, the diocese arranged for us to receive Holy Communion at the entrance of designated churches around Macau. We started attending the online Mass with our phones in the car, and going

out to receive Holy Communion. It was an important step for our family because we had really missed receiving Communion. As with many other things, I think that making a small sacrifice helped us to appreciate the things we had been taking for granted.

For my family, the pandemic has been a chance to realize that we are not helpless: some things are more difficult, but we can find new ways to do them. In the beginning we were afraid because we didn't know what was going to happen. But now we've seen how good can come out of this difficult situation, and I thank God every day for what He gives me. Some of His gifts are big and others are small, but the most important gift is how He has helped me to hear His voice more clearly in my life and in my family.

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