

"All our plans are always only 'penciled in'"

Katerina, who lives in Canada, recounts her family's struggles and joys during the quarantine.

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Our quarantine story in Canada is most likely similar to thousands of other people's stories. In early March, we watched in disbelief as European countries began shutting down until we began experiencing it ourselves.

I had to admit that the first couple of weeks were filled with anxiety and questions to which I didn't have answers...

Our oldest son was studying abroad and we kept asking ourselves, should he return home? Are the borders going to close down? Is his health insurance going to cover potential hospitalization for COVID-19? At night, the worst possible scenarios played in my head looking all too realistic as they often do at 2 a.m.

Since I am a healthcare worker and my husband has underlying health problems, our kids asked me whether I was going to stop working to protect dad.

We had simple questions about grocery shopping. Do we really have to disinfect each item? We wondered about Sunday Mass. How can we be without Sunday Mass? We wondered about daily exercise. Are we allowed

to go for a run? We wondered about access to books. On the last night just before everything came to a halt, instead of packages of toilet paper, we brought home armfuls of books from our local library. We had questions about visiting friends. Our second-born son has not seen his girlfriend for the past two months with a ten-second exception when they exchanged their anniversary presents on a sidewalk.

Finally, we had questions about tennis tournaments. Our youngest daughter had worked really hard to qualify for the National Championships only to learn soon after that it was canceled. For her, this was the equivalent of qualifying for the Olympics and not attending.

Two huge consolations

In the middle of the anxieties I had two huge consolations: daily trips to the adoration chapel that stayed

open to public despite the fact that there were no public Masses, and a hug from my husband Paul at the end of long days when I came home from work.

My personal lowest point came the day when even our adoration chapel closed down and when we came to the conclusion at home that it would be better for me to sleep downstairs on the sofa and completely avoid physical contact with my husband and kids. We quickly realized that “no physical contact at home” would have been a good decision for a couple of days, but that it was neither realistic nor wise to adhere to for many, many months; we abandoned it, and I had to remind myself again and again that Christ doesn't limit his presence to the Blessed Sacrament in our local adoration chapel, but that He is present in the lonely elderly patients that need comfort and consolation. And yes, you can smile

under a mask: your eyes will show it!! He is also truly present in my family and friends that count on my cheerfulness and helping hand.

New routine

As many other families, we developed our new routine with work from home for my husband and online school work for our children, with my work outside the house, exercise schedules, online Masses, and daily video conferencing with family and friends.

One of the highlights will be my dad's birthday party that we organized with extended family over Zoom. However, we also played board games with friends (yes, it is possible over Skype if you have two boards and duplicate each move), had DIY haircuts with mixed results, painted Easter eggs, spent many hours in the kitchen with our kids because they now had more time to cook, bake,

and experiment (homemade kimchi anyone?), and did chores as a team. One day, when I was washing dishes, my husband was drying them and one of our daughters was clearing the table without realizing that Paul kept placing clean dishes back on the dining room table. This perpetual cycle stopped only when I started to question how come we used so many wine glasses for one supper.

The power of family suppers that last over one hour

We have always known the value of family suppers, but as our children became teens and young adults, different work/school/tennis/volunteer schedules made family meals a luxury to be experienced only on Sundays. Now during the quarantine, we have daily family meals that easily last over one hour and we cherish this time we have for conversation and laughter. This is

something that we are all going to miss as our lives return back to busy mode.

Next week, our oldest son graduates and receives his Master's degree. It will be a bittersweet moment because we are immensely proud of him, but we won't be there to hug him and celebrate with him as borders are still closed. Even his graduation (as thousands of other graduations around the world) will be a virtual one.

All our plans are always only "penciled in"

It would be nice to say that the pandemic is now over and that we learned our lessons and are grateful for this experience, but we all know very well this is just the beginning; nothing is over yet. It is a daily reminder that all our plans are always only "penciled in" and that when we present them to our Lord at

the beginning of each day we have to be open to modifications and to trust Him unconditionally.

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