

A message worth repeating



Technology can be a very good thing indeed, especially in times of uncertainty such as what we're all feeling now in the midst of the novel coronavirus pandemic. For those in quarantine or self-isolation in various regions of the country and the world, the simple act of picking up a phone and speaking with a friend or a loved one is a godsend.

A friend of mine who lives in Rome, for example, where the situation is among the most restricted, insists having even a short phone conversation truly helps to [keep her spirits up](#). Even when residents of the Eternal City are granted permission to leave their apartment and house for groceries or medicine, the streets, except for the police, are deserted. So phone contact again is a [lifeline to the outside world](#). Of course, TV and the internet also keep us updated on the latest information and remind us of the steps we can take together to help wipe out this illness. Sending emails, texts, touching base through Facetime and Facebook are all great ways to stay connected.

But what about connecting or reconnecting in a different way when it comes to most of us adjusting, at least for the time being, to this new normal? Even if we're not under a lockdown, we are finding ourselves spending more time at home. Restaurants, fitness centers, movie theaters, many malls and other places we are so used to gathering are closed. That means more time with family and hopefully less time with technology.

Once again, that's what Pope Francis is asking us to do. This time it was in a March 18 interview with the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica*. The pope offered more advice about how to face the daily challenges posed by COVID-19. "Some families eat

together at home in silence – not because they are listening to one another but because the parents are watching television while they eat or their children are on their mobile phones.”

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The pope told the newspaper the families could be described as monks isolated from one another with no communication. “There is no communication here,” he said. “Instead, listening to one another is important because we understand one another’s needs, struggles, desires.”

In recent months he has gone back to this theme of personal communication – how families might get closer by backing away from screens. As 2019 wrapped up, Francis encouraged families to put away the cellphones at mealtimes, during his Dec. 29 Angelus message using the Holy Family as an example.

“We have to get back to communicating in our families,” the pope said. “Fathers, parents, children, grandparents, brothers and sisters, this is a task to undertake today, on the day of the Holy Family. They prayed, worked and communicated with each other. I ask myself if your family knows how to communicate or are you like those kids at meal tables where everyone is chatting on their mobile phones where there is silence like at a Mass.”

At the start of Lent 2020, he told us yet one more time to put down the phones and turn off the television. We live in a world, he said, polluted by “too much verbal violence” that often includes offensive and harmful words. His advice was to put down the phone and pick up the Bible, spending more time as a family in prayer talking to God.

“Lent,” the pope said, “is a time to disconnect from the cellphones and connect to the Gospel. It is time to give up useless words, chatter and talk and speak directly to the Lord. Fasting is not only losing weight it is seeking the

beauty of a simple life.”

Getting back to the most recent comments from the pope concerning communicating differently and more effectively, he expressed to *La Repubblica* how we need a more concrete way of reconnecting. Whether it’s praying the Rosary together as a family, taking turns doing the daily Mass readings out loud, telling stories or sharing memories, it’s time for some to learn what just might be a brand new language.

“There is a language made of concrete gestures that must be safeguarded,” the pope said. “The suffering people are enduring at this time should make us open to this language.”

The same message from the pope, at different times and in different venues. But a message certainly worth repeating until it finally sinks in for good.

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