

How is your prayer life in your new normal?



Six months ago, when everything else was shutting down because of the pandemic, my colleagues and I, without much notice, packed up our essentials – laptops, monitors, keyboards, stylebooks, dictionaries and other tools of the job – and walked out of OSV headquarters, none of us knowing when we'd return.

Most of us have stopped back at least a time or two since – to check the mail, or get a book we'd left on our desks, or, in my case, during the dog days of quarantine, to get away from loud and constantly present children. Despite the distractions, the transition from working at the office to working at home has been surprisingly smooth (and it wasn't only because sweatpants are now considered work attire). But it hasn't all been quite as comfortable. Over the past several months, I've found out that the downside of working from home is that I'm always at work. Always.

Lately, I've fallen into a bad habit of being on duty almost constantly. Partly, it's because of my optimistic nature. I think that if I stay up late, work ahead and check things off of my to-do list, I'll be able to relax a little the next day. But it hasn't worked out that way; things get added to the list faster than I can scratch them off of it. Some of the round-the-clock work simply stems from the fact that there's a lot of work that needs done, but not all of it. Better organization would help; better discipline, even more so. The workload has been a source of stress that I can't seem to shake, but it isn't just that; there's been something missing that I couldn't quite put my finger on until recently.

Knowing that I've been working too much and spending too

little quality time with my family, on a recent Friday night, I decided to put away my laptop, snuggle a kid or two and watch a movie that was neither animated nor featured superheroes. I'd been wanting to watch the new movie "Fatima" since it was released in late August, and while most of the kids were willing spectators, our 15-year-old groaned in protest. He'd been forced to sit through enough faith-based films to expect the worst (and, frankly, I couldn't blame him for his assumption).

But "Fatima" was different. Not once did I reach for my phone to answer an email or flip open my computer to tinker with a story that I'd been trying to finish. I simply sat and watched. The quality of the film surpassed my expectation – from the well-written script, to the beautiful cinematography, to the marvelous acting. And while the storyline was familiar, the filmmakers truly managed to give new life to the true events that happened in a little Portuguese town 100 years ago.

What struck me most as I watched the film, however, wasn't the skill of the actors or the director – I was too immersed in the film to even notice their craft at the time – but it was the faith of the three shepherd children that consumed my thoughts throughout the movie. The children were driven so strongly by their faith in God and by their trust in Mary that whenever adversity struck, they would fall to their knees in prayer.

Midway through the film, I realized what has been missing in my new work-from-home life. As my daily routine has changed drastically, my prayer life has almost completely disappeared. Gone is my hour-and-a-half daily commute, and with it, the quiet time I'd spend praying the Rosary in the morning or laying the burdens of the day before God in the afternoon. Because I've been working well into the evenings, I haven't stopped to pray with my kids before bedtime. Because I'm exhausted when I do eventually shut things down for the night,

I'm asleep before I even remember to thank God for the day's blessings or ask him to calm my worries.

When adversity struck, I tried to bear it all on my own, thinking that I could outwork the mounting stress. But I couldn't. I can't. And so my prayer is for God to grant me even a fraction of the faith displayed by the three little seers in Fátima. Help me to model their trust and devotion. Lucia dos Santos and Francisco and Jacinta Marto, pray for me.

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