

If you are troubled by the pandemic, political infighting, and just general negative feelings, a Benedictine friend of Fr. Mac offers some thoughts and advice. He recently sent the following comments to a 40-year-old mother of 3 when she asked, "How do I keep faith in my family amid the ugliness in the world?"

With everything going on in the world, from the pandemic to political strife, I've never felt more grateful to be a monk. It's not entirely a matter of avoiding the chaos, but in some way it is. My decision to enter the monastery looked rather foolish to the eyes of the world for about 15 years, but lately, many people are probably wanting to escape the craziness in the world, and all of a sudden I look like a wise one.

While that's not really possible for everyone to 'hide out in a monastery' (nor is it what they are called to do) I still think there are ways we can safeguard our hearts from the stress and anxiety, or whatever you want to call it, and find God in the midst of everything. In some way I think that all Christians are called to have a "monastic heart", which is to say, their heart is given to God, even if they have to work and live with a level of chaos or "ugliness."

With that said- I'll offer 3 things that come to mind for keeping faith in the family.

1. I think we have to find some way of disconnecting or limiting our exposure to social media and news media. It's becoming an uglier place and it's unrealistic to think that we can consume its content for a significant time during the day and not have it impact us or put us on edge. I have probably spent 20 minutes total on news sites since the November election. I've never felt more peaceful. I don't really miss anything. I remind myself that in previous years or generations, we didn't have a 24 hour news cycle, and we still found a way to exist. We didn't have immediate and instant access, and people found a way to survive. I would suggest limiting content in the family. If I were a father of a family, I'd implement some sort of "no devices" (unless for school purposes) from 6:00pm to 8:00pm or something like that. It would encourage families to truly be present to one another. There's many good things about social media and the Internet, obviously, but we have to make sure it's a tool *we* use, lest it use *us*.

2. I think the best thing we can do is be people of faith. Specifically, we need to be people of faith in Jesus Christ, not any particular political party. No political leader is going to solve all of our problems, but some people live like that's the case. There have been serious problems facing the world in every time and age. People of faith responded with turning everything over to God in prayer. I never grew up praying the Rosary as a family, but I really respect families that did. I would combat the evil in the world through a daily (or at least every other day) family Rosary. It takes about 20-25 minutes max, but it would be a great way of instilling faith in the family and developing a devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Essential for growth in faith is learning how to pray. We start learning by making the time.

3. Lastly, I'd suggest simply to talk to your children about your faith as a parent.

Studies show that children are more likely to continue practicing their faith if the

parents share personally about *why* their faith is important. This is especially true for the father of a family (studies have shown..). A practice at supper or as a family might be just sharing a struggle or challenge from the day and a blessing or something you're thankful for. Everyone in the family could do this. It acknowledges that all blessings come from God and it helps us not fall into the trap that we are always deprived of something essential for our happiness. We aren't deprived of anything, even in the worst of circumstances, we are still free to give ourselves to God and seek Him in peace of heart. I'll offer a few quotes from one of my favorite spiritual writers, Fr. Jacques Philippe (*Interior Freedom*): "The most important and most fruitful acts of our freedom are not those by which we transform the outside world as those by which we change our inner attitude in light of the faith that God can bring good out of everything without exception. Even when, externally, there is nothing to be done, we still have inner freedom to continue to love. no circumstance, however tragic, can rob us of that."

I think when we see ugliness in the world, sin and violence, we have to acknowledge it for what it is. I don't indulge in the media because I know how easy it is for me to be robbed of my peace of heart. If I am not peaceful, I do not pray well. If I do not pray well, I am not serving or honoring my family and friends who rely on my prayerful intercession. Fr. Philippe writes on forgiveness, saying, "When we refuse to forgive someone for harm done to us, we are adding another wrong to the first. That solves nothing at all. We are increasing the quantity of evil in the world, which has quite enough as it is. Let us not join in the propagation of evil. St. Paul tells us: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.""

In the monastery we are reading a book about World War II. It just talked about the bombing of Pearl Harbor. [If we think things are bad now, look back then. Shortly after the War, in 1948, the famous writer C.S. Lewis wrote:](#)

"In one way we think a great deal too much of the atomic bomb. "How are we to live in an atomic age?" I am tempted to reply: "Why, as you would have lived in the sixteenth century when the plague visited London almost every year, or as you would have lived in a Viking age when raiders from Scandinavia might land and cut your throat any night; or indeed, as you are already living in an age of cancer, an age of syphilis, an age of paralysis, an age of air raids, an age of railway accidents, an age of motor accidents."

In other words, do not let us begin by exaggerating the novelty of our situation. This is the first point to be made: and the first action to be taken is to pull ourselves together. If we are all going to be destroyed by an atomic bomb, let that bomb when it comes find us doing sensible and human things—praying, working, teaching, reading, listening to music, bathing the children, playing tennis, chatting to our friends over a pint and a game of darts—not huddled together like frightened sheep and thinking about bombs. They may break our bodies, but they need not dominate our minds."