

If there is one thing I know about this pandemic, it is that it has been anything but normal. This virus has had such an immense impact on every aspect of my life, whether it is attending church and school, seeing friends and family members, or finding ways to help those in need around my community. It has been a challenging time, but I think that I have found ways to continue to serve and stay active in my faith, all the while social distancing.

One of the things that has been the hardest to get used to has been attending mass by watching it online. Watching Easter Sunday mass, usually one of the most joyful, crowded masses of the year, felt especially odd. The one thing I have learned, though, is that just because we are social distancing, doesn't mean we have to be *spiritually* distancing. Being mindful of God and his blessings, as well as prayer, can be done anywhere during this time of quarantine: walking the dog, gardening, exercising, etc. This has given me peace of mind that even though we aren't physically together in church, we can be spiritually together on our own and help others during this time.

Another challenging aspect of quarantine has been the inability to visit my family, especially my grandparents, during this difficult time. Checking in on my grandfather who lives nearby and not hugging him and being in his home was very hard, and calling my grandparents in Florida just to hear how bored and isolated they feel has been heartbreaking. These situations have inspired me to perform acts of service, so their situation is just a little more bearable. I have sent care packages, cards, and baked goods, and called them to chat frequently. It is so important to look after these important people in our lives, as this quarantine is a very lonely time for them.

Some other ways I have found to serve have been right in my neighborhood, as one of my neighbors has started a collection bin for essential groceries and supplies, toys, games, and books for our neighborhood families. I decided I would clean out my room to look for donation items, putting some of my favorite books and old toys in the

collection, so some of the younger kids on my block can enjoy them too. These are little things that can give so much hope and joy to my neighbors during this scary time. All it takes is to do an act of service like this to make someone's day and to let them know they have a support system no matter what.

I will be attending Georgetown Visitation in the fall and their core values, known as "The Little Virtues," come straight from St. Francis De Sales. These virtues, which include kindness, thoughtful concern for others, and patience, to name a few, are virtues we can truly live by during this time when we are trying to serve. We can use kindness to connect with neighbors, aging grandparents, people in need, and all of the healthcare heroes during this crisis. We can exhibit thoughtful concern for others through donating to the poor and sending mail and care packages. And, although it is hard, we can show patience to get through this pandemic and trust that God has a plan for us. I have certainly used patience while helping my grandparents navigate Zoom video chatting! When I have felt bored, sad, or angry about our current circumstances, I have reflected on these virtues and have been amazed by how relevant they are to our world's situation today, and how much I can use them when performing acts of service.

In conclusion, I have learned many key lessons during this time - a time filled with constant news alerts, social distancing, and quarantining. The preeminent lesson I have learned, though, is that you do not have to be gathered somewhere among people to make change: you can do it on your own wherever you may be, which in our country's case, is at home. Simply praying for the well-being of our country and church is a perfect example of an act that you can do at home. So, amid this pandemic, I am striving to perform as many socially-distant acts of service as possible, so hopefully we, as a community, can get through this difficult and stressful time, and end up closer to God than ever before.