

Dangers of the Internet for the family

My sermon today will deal with the dangers of the Internet for the family. I will divide it into three parts: Internet and the youth, Internet and Mum and finally Internet and dad!

I. Internet and the youth

What is the impact on the mind of our youngsters?

The Internet as a tool can be a great tool. Yet, as a rule, it has not helped man's thinking process. The overflow of images and speed do not reflect reality. Here are some examples:

- I can gossip about my neighbor on the Internet w/o ever having to face the consequences in my neighborhood.
- I can see a movie of a blizzard without experiencing the consequences of it.
- I can lose my life in a video game and get a new one by a simple click. This is not real.
- I can have 300 network friends and be the most anti-social person with no charity to family members.

The Internet is the domain of fairyland!

Intense Internet exposure gives the youth a wrong understanding of life. They build their life around advertisements, Hollywood fantasy, and the ugly world of the News agencies.

Finally, the Internet offers news, but no discernment; rather than information, it creates mental stress and diffamation. Under Google's universal magisterium urbi et orbi, the village idiot has the authority of an expert. Carefully selected school teachers are now replaced in the Internet by anonymous writers who influence your children.

What about virtue?

I have not spoken yet of the moral dangers. In general, the Internet does not encourage virtue. Indeed, to avoid becoming a puppet and victim of the Net, strong habits and good discipline are pre-required.

The Internet is open to everything, everyone, and even the most perverse! How can we expect our youth to make their way in such a jungle without being hurt or trapped? A teenager using the Internet out of curiosity, without supervision or purpose, is bound to fall into mortal sin.

Dear parents, let me ask you 2 questions:

- Do your teenagers have free access to guns and bullets in your home?
- Do your teenagers use a chainsaw without proper training and serious safety measures?

What about education?

Let me mention in particular the use of texting, chatting, mailing or video whether by phone, email, Facebook, Google+, Twitter, Skype you name it!

The average number of texts for a teenager today is 60 per day. Who are these friends? Is the friendship based on a common goal, raise the mind and soul? The Internet provides many fake friends with artificial profiles, with details which are gradually more weird and provocative.

In this environment, modesty is short lived. Presently, one teenager out of four has sent inappropriate pictures thru the cell phone. In the best of cases, these friendships amount to fleeing from one's real duty of state.

You probably have witnessed at a restaurant members of a family sitting together and each texting to absent friends? Those present become absent whereas absent people are virtually present. Are we respecting the order of charity here?

But the main issue of teenager's texting is not the number of road accidents, it is the wreckage of the personality, the immaturity and the inconstancy which texting generates.

Immaturity because, when dealing with a feeling, the teen communicates it, transfers it, looking for a quick sentimental support from the peers. How could a girl take advantage of a correction by facing alone the consequences of her act when she can rely immediately on the support of a peer, generally against the parent's authority? Or how can a boy harvest the fruit of facing a frustration when he can immediately get distracted with a classmate?

Texting brings **inconstancy** because texts distract from the duty of state. they come any time, day or night. Studies, reading, prayer are interrupted; concentration and focus are never achieved. Commitment and punctuality follow suit. I do not need to plan things ahead: I can just text and get away with on time appointments!

Of course, as they grow older, teens will text to people of the other sex. I won't elaborate on the occasion of sins of these exclusive friendships, nor on the grave responsibility of parents who permit them.

Moving forward, the habit of texting between young adults who are dating offers only partial reality, an on-going exchange of emotions, a lack of silence and of reflection so needed for a good preparation to matrimony. And notice that the dating does not start with high ideals and serious conversations as it should; on the contrary the relationship starts with a virtual exchange of insignificant details leaving no place for deep conversations and exchanges of personal thoughts.

What about the vocation?

The omnipresence of the social media affects especially those teenagers who had a vocation to the religious life. The mind has wandered endlessly, the will has been flooded with constant emotions, the spirit of the world has been the daily bread of the soul. How can one even consider a life of sacrifice, of duty, of silence and contemplation, of forgetfulness of self? Sometimes also, prolonged vices, shocking spectacles or scandalous contacts have ruined a genuine generosity. Answering God's call for an addicted Internet user borders on the miraculous.

II. Internet and The Family

Internet and the Mother

If the screen is especially dangerous for the youth, it is also a danger for adults. As a powerful tool, it allows the mother to get information in "real" time; it can bring good reading and audiobooks, games and healthy distractions to the home. It helps her cope with solitude, gain a few dollars or pursue studies.

Oftentimes however the Internet will be for the woman an occasion to flee her duty of state, to waste time, to gossip or listen to gossip, to feel important and appreciated on the blogs. Videos and TV shows may be a Trojan horse for a worldly spirit getting in. Videos must be carefully selected and watching them must be planned and rare which too often is not the case when the Internet has invaded the home.

I would like to offer three points of examination of conscience to the mothers:

- How often do distractions or neglect of prayer life come from the Internet?
- How much is it a cope-out to break the routine and hardship of one's state in life?
- Regarding the children: how do I really implement the rules about the use of the Internet and of my phone and how do I practice true supervision?

Dear mothers, never close your eyes thinking: "this cannot happen to MY children!"

III. Internet and Dad

Before God, the head of the family is responsible for Internet use at home, all home devices and WI-Fi connections, taking into account the general weakness of our wounded nature.

In our religious houses, Internet access is allowed to members as long as they are in a public place. Their smartphones must have a filter. This prudent rule should not be the exclusivity of priests.

Which father of a family would allow potentially poisoned water to his home, without firstly setting up a filter? A filter and even an accountability system is certainly a grave moral obligation for any householder. Under pain of mortal sin, Dad is responsible to provide moral safety on all screens used by his dependents. An automatic clock should also stop Internet access after curfew.

Besides implementing the above-mentioned rules, Dad's examination of conscience should include time wasted with News and Sports and Video games. He should examine the virtue of chastity. Addiction to improper material demands special help from priest and professionals. More powerful than cocaine, Internet addiction has to be treated with honesty, courage and the help of others.

Conclusion: Rules for the family

Internet is a powerful tool that can build or destroy. The spiritual Exercises give the rule for its use. I use a means in as much as it helps me to attain the goal: the salvation of my soul. If the Internet is a proximate occasion of sin, Christ' words apply in full force: "Cut it off!" If I need internet access for work, then, I need to follow my confessor's advice.

Obviously our children need to be gradually taught the proper use of the Internet. In lower grades, the only things needed are real games with real people! No email should be authorized.

High school teens can be initiated to Internet use. Here, we strongly recommend some accountability software: i.e. a software which reports on their Internet activity. Also, their first steps in the world of Internet should be guided with clear goals, limited time and prudent choice, aware that the parents, as well as God, will know all their activities.

Dear parents, remember that, on your wedding day, God promised to give you all the graces needed to raise your children. Prayers and sacrifices, force of character to implement a Catholic structure, the prudent advice to reform a home will always have an impact on the most rebellious wills. Remember Saint Monica converting her son Augustine. Recall Our Lady's words at Fatima: "there is no problem that the Rosary cannot solve!" The example of the Holy family will always remain the example for all the families, with God's service first, charity, generosity and respect, external and internal chastity, and family life. May Our Lady protect you, inspire you and help you to make your family a sanctuary where Jesus is really the King.