

# Saving 'Face' with God

## Catholics give up networking site for Lent

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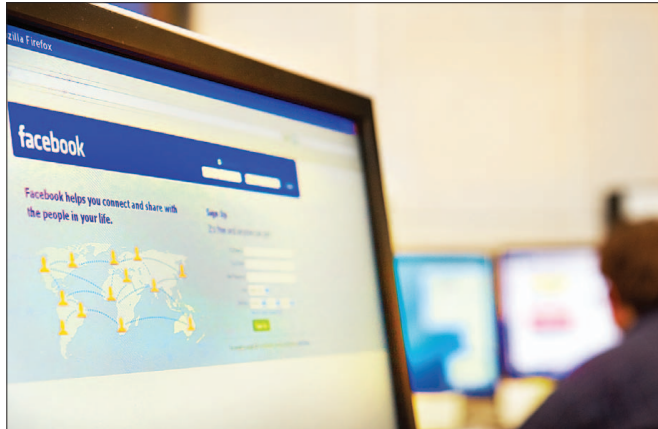
When deciding what to give up for Lent, Fordham University student Rebecca Gehman settled on sacrificing something that she spent five to 10 hours a week doing — surfing Facebook.

"I went to church, and I thought what would actually bring me closer to God or give me a better sense of self?" said Gehman, 18, of Manhattan, who admits she used to log in about five times a day. "What takes up time in my day? Facebook."

Many Catholics who give up something they enjoy during the 40 days before Easter, and Facebook, which has more than 175 million users, is becoming as popular as chocolate as a Lenten sacrifice. Several Facebook groups have sprouted up devoted to giving up the social networking Web site for Lent.

The faithful have taken a cue from Italian bishops who urged Catholics to give up or moderate text messaging, using iPods or driving cars for Lent, which started Feb. 25.

"Technology has become the centerpiece for our culture, and in many, many ways that's a great



Catholic Clergy from Italy to the Bronx have encouraged followers to give up technology, such as Facebook or iPods, for Lent.

(RJMICKELSON/AMNY)

### WAYS TO WORSHIP

#### Some sacrifices and customs in other religions:

- **Yom Kippur:** Jews fast from sundown the previous day to nightfall on the holiday.
- **Ramadan:** A month of daily fasting, from dawn until dusk.
- **Kathina Ceremony:** A Buddhist practice of giving monks new robes and other offerings after their three-month retreat season.
- **Great Lent:** An Eastern Orthodox holiday of abstaining from meat, fish, dairy products, wine and oil seven weeks before Easter.

thing," said Bill Donohue, president of the Catholic League. "[Lent is] a good time for reflection and to pare back a bit."

A priest at Fordham University, a Jesuit school, suggested students give up Facebook, a move praised by some administrators.

"It's much harder to give up than chocolate for our students of this

generation," said Angela O'Donnell, associate director of Fordham's Curran Center for American Catholic Studies.

"Facebook fasters" are finding that halting their minute-by-minute status updates or picture postings turned out to be easier than they thought. However, some have found the site is often a necessity and had

to break the "fast."

Ponnu Varghese, 19, another Fordham student who is Indian Orthodox, said she and a friend traded passwords and e-mail logins to lock each other out of Facebook for Lent.

While she broke her fast recently to get information about a friend passing away and to organize a religious group event, Varghese said she'll go back to life without Facebook soon.

Some New Yorkers, however, said they wouldn't even consider giving up social networking.

"This is New York," said Marcelo Puebla, 38, of Union Square, who gave up junk food for Lent. "You can't be out of touch."

Melinda Hsia and Casey Feldman contributed to this report.

### Briefs

#### NYPD to crack down on chatty drivers

The NYPD yesterday announced a citywide crackdown on the use of cell phones while driving. The 24-hour initiative begins at midnight Thursday. Individuals using a hand-held cell phone while driving in New York City face a fine of \$120. (AMNY)

#### Agency presents gloomy forecast on economy

New York City's economic downturn will be "deep and protracted," the city's Independent Budget Office forecasts. Ronnie Lowenstein, the agency's director, told the City Council during budget hearings yesterday that the city will lose 270,000 jobs from the first quarter of 2008 through the second quarter of 2010. (AP)

#### Two dozen want to speak when Madoff pleads

Federal prosecutors say they've received more than two dozen e-mails from investors seeking to speak Thursday when Bernard Madoff is expected to plead guilty. The 70-year-old former Nasdaq chairman was arrested in December on a securities fraud charge. Prosecutors say he confessed to family members that he had run a \$50 billion Ponzi scheme. (AP)

#### Saleswoman guilty of scamming Saks store

A former Saks Fifth Avenue jewelry saleswoman was convicted yesterday in a scheme that netted her thousands of dollars in unearned commissions and cost the store \$1.4 million. Cecilia Villacorta, 52, faces up to seven years in prison on a grand larceny charge and up to four years on charges of falsifying business records. (AP)

## Prosecutor: Dentist's ex-wife chose park to avoid murder rap

A woman who hatched a plot with a relative to kill her ex-husband over a custody battle chose a public park as the crime scene so she wouldn't be suspected and planned to tape the shooting in case she was double-crossed, a prosecutor said yesterday.

Mazoltuv Borukhova bought a button-hole camera to film her distant cousin Mikhail Mallyayev shoot her ex-husband, but she couldn't figure out how to work the camera and Mallyayev fired before she arrived, prosecutor Brad Leventhal said in closing arguments

of their murder trial.

Orthodontist Daniel Malakov, 34, was shot in the back by a man with a makeshift silencer as he dropped off his 4-year-old daughter, Michelle, to his ex-wife.

"The whole idea to do it on a Sunday morning in a park in front of people was to eliminate herself as a suspect," Leventhal told jurors.

Borukhova, an internist, and Mallyayev have both pleaded not guilty to first-degree murder in the Oct. 28, 2007, death of Malakov. They face 25 years to life in prison if convicted. (AP)



Borukhova



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