

WHEN IN ROME...

DO AS THESE ROMANS

These youth find strength in righteous living. From left to right: Andrew Bishop, Arianna Hibo, Riccardo Celestini, Denise De Feo, Davide Bosco, Dalila Vardeu, and Sami Pace.

BY JENNIFER MADDY
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Youth in Rome, Italy, stand strong against invading influences of the world.



People popped in and out of shops and waved hello to friends in the crowded city center. Some people discussed business on their way to work, while others traded opinions on politics. Children played, enjoying the morning sun.

That's what a typical day might have been like in ancient Rome.

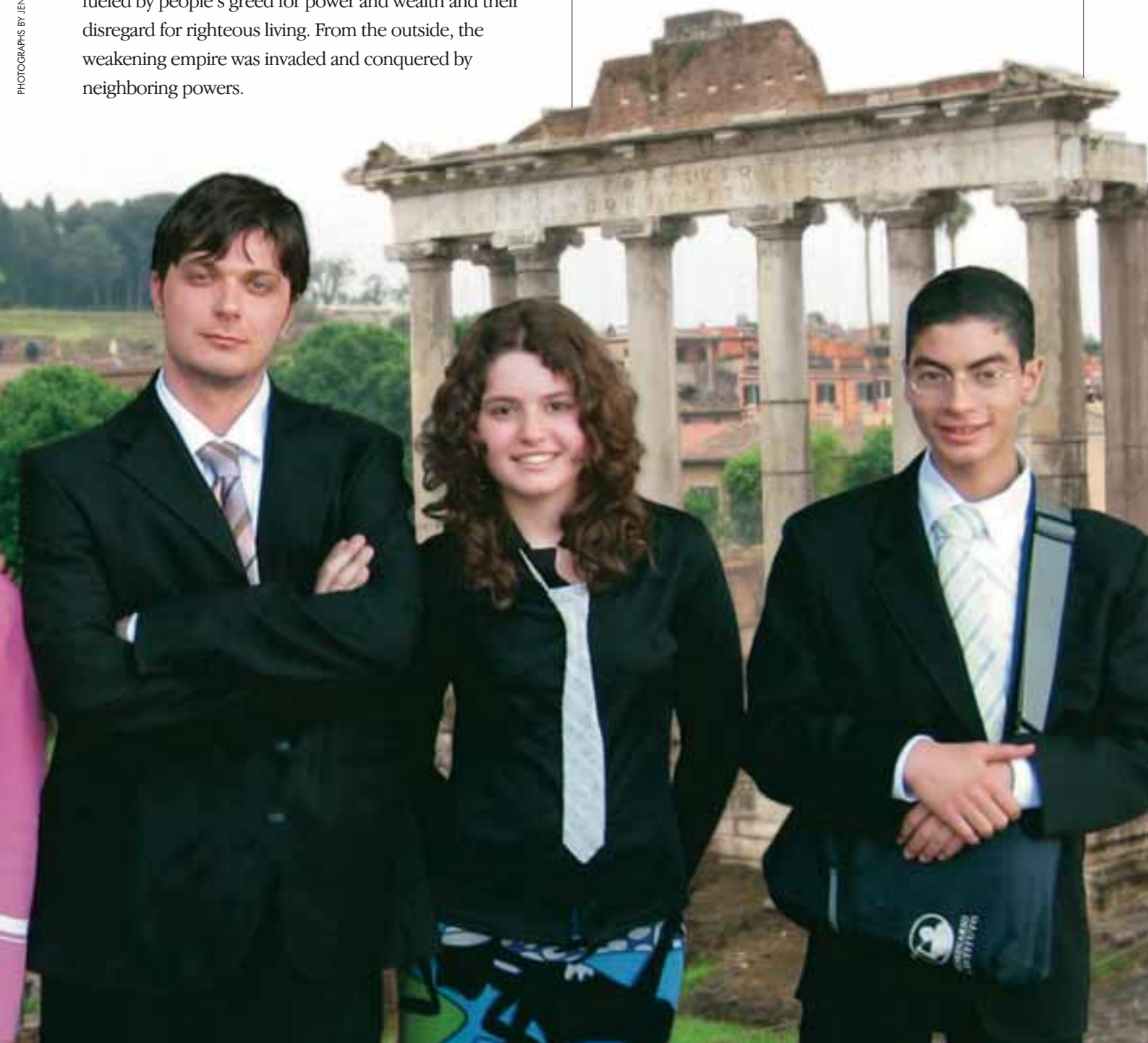
The Roman Empire was a mighty civilization with military and economic dominance. Who could have imagined its downfall?

But fall it did. From the inside, the empire's decay was fueled by people's greed for power and wealth and their disregard for righteous living. From the outside, the weakening empire was invaded and conquered by neighboring powers.

Today, the young men and young women of the Rome Italy Stake stand strong, as the empire once did. But these youth hold steady against the invading influences of the adversary and strengthen their spirituality by living righteously.

Roman Missionaries

In a letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ" (Romans 1:16). Today's Latter-day Saint youth in Rome are not ashamed, nor do they need encouragement in order to stand up for what they believe, though sometimes it might be hard.



Amid the ruins of an ancient city, these young Latter-day Saints build their lives on the gospel, good friendships, and high standards.



Arianna Hibo, 15, says, “I have some friends who don’t share my ideas, but they always respect me.”



Dalila Vardeu, 15, adds, “I have friends who listen to me and try to understand what I am.”

And what is she? What characteristics describe these few Latter-day Saint youth surviving in the busy Italian capital? Honest, dedicated, friendly, righteous, and sincere in their desire to live and share the gospel.



Sami Pace, 16, served as deacons quorum president when he was the only member of the quorum. “I learned the importance of missionary work, even if up to now I have not had any results,” he says. “I’m the only young man in my area who’s a member. Every day I understand something more about missionary work.”



Denise De Feo, 15, sees an example in her older brother: “He’s on a mission now, and he’s having all these experiences. Not

all of them are good, but every time he has something to teach. That comforts me.”



The youth know that even seemingly small acts of service or missionary work can have a positive impact on others. Davide

Bosco, 17, says, “In the scriptures, the Lord asks us to shine (see Matthew 5:16)—not to do great things, but in the little things.”

For the Strength of Italian Youth

The young members in Rome do shine, and they do so in stark contrast to the many ancient Romans who unfortunately embraced unrighteous practices that contributed to their moral decay. Instead, today’s youth reflect the

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Light of Christ and strengthen their spirituality by maintaining high standards and attending the temple.

Denise finds that living the gospel provides a relief from the many pressures in today's world. The gospel also helps her know how to choose the right. "The things that my friends do are not always good things that I should do," she says simply.



But Riccardo Celestini, 14, emphasizes the importance of having support when trying to make right choices: "Sometimes I also need the help of my family or other help because I cannot stand alone."



Some of that other help comes from *For the Strength of Youth*. The pamphlet helps these youth in different ways. Andrew Bishop, 13, won't go to his baseball team's practices and games if they're on Sundays.

Arianna also follows the counsel on Sabbath day observance. She is a runner and had to race on many Sundays. Finally, she knew she had to make a decision. "I prayed, and even though it was hard for me to decide, I decided to go to church instead," she says.

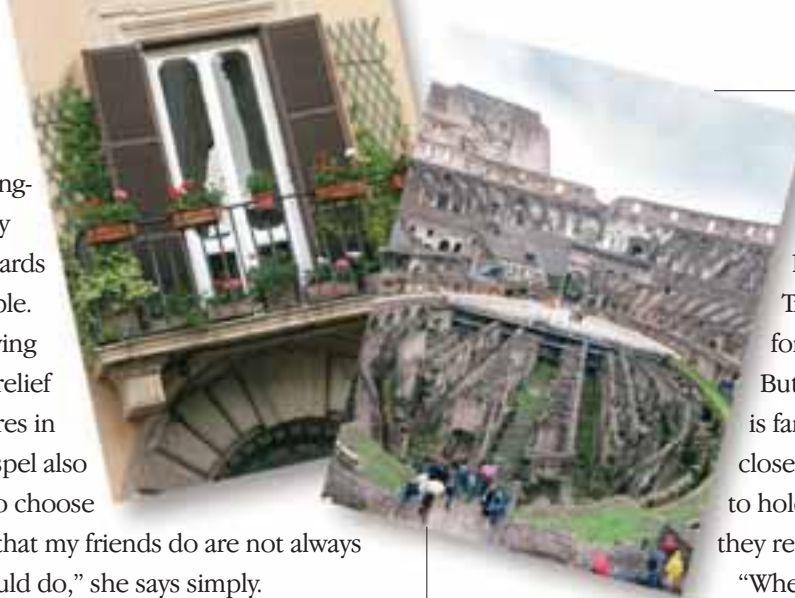
For Davide and Riccardo, the counsel on honesty helps. "In school we have the opportunity to cheat and to copy homework from someone else," Davide says. "But not doing that will make the difference between us and other people." He adds that honesty "is one of the principles that you might think isn't very important, but it's what makes the difference."

Riccardo knows that honesty in sports is important too: "If you play fair, you know you were doing your best and not cheating. You are satisfied with what you have done."

Near and Far

There is one thing that these youth aren't satisfied with, and that's the number of times they can attend the temple. Without a temple in Italy, the Church members in

"I learned the importance of missionary work."



Rome drive about nine hours (one way) to the Bern Switzerland Temple. Trips to perform baptisms for the dead are infrequent. But even though the temple is far away, these youth keep it close to their hearts by striving to hold onto the special feelings they receive when they attend.

"When I'm at the temple, I feel at home," Sami says. "Every time I grow a little more."

"My favorite part about the temple is that I feel the Spirit very strongly," says Andrew. "I know that our ancestors are thanking us for helping them. We give them a gift."

Dalila agrees. "It is beautiful to feel that the people accept what we are doing for them. It's a wonderful experience."

Arianna wraps up her friends' comments: "All the things they said are true. The temple is a holy place on earth, and it doesn't matter that the temple is in Switzerland or Spain. The Spirit is always the same, and we can grow every time."

Present-day Rome is littered with broken pieces of ancient buildings, stairways, and arches—pieces of once-grand structures destroyed by stronger forces. The youth in Rome, on the other hand, take the pieces of their lives—the gospel, scriptures, family, standards, the temple—and develop solid testimonies that withstand the negative influences of the world.

Sami has one suggestion for gaining that strength: "Don't give up. Let's go forward." **NE**

"The Lord asks us to shine."

