

## **Covid 19 – The Mount St. Bernard Experience**

Whilst we are acutely aware of the suffering the Covid-19 pandemic has caused throughout the world, from a monastic point of view we have found the ensuing lockdown a beneficial experience. From the 23rd March our church, guesthouse and shop closed. The sudden cessation of these activities made us realise just how stretched we had allowed ourselves to become and the calmness that followed caused many of us to say ‘this is how a monastery should be.’

For the first time in living memory a whole week went by without a monk exiting the monastery due to there being no hospital appointments, etc. With no trips out and no calls to the guesthouse we were much more ‘present’ to one another as a community and this was very beneficial. Having no guests and no congregation for Mass made us rediscover the basic truth that our vocation is primarily one of prayer and the contemplative life, that is our ministry, that is our service to the Church and the world. Whilst we have no desire to turn in on ourselves the lockdown has taught us that we were trying to meet too many needs coming to us from outside.

Our day to day life wasn’t affected that much as we have extensive grounds to walk around in and as we are a kind of sealed unit we didn’t think it necessary to take any special distancing measures amongst ourselves. Our liturgy remained pretty much the same.

Thanks be to God no one has succumbed to the virus, though we still remain vigilant, even though some of the restrictions have been lifted. Each evening after vespers we go to the Lady chapel to say a special prayer for the end of the pandemic in front of an icon of Salus Populi Romani and at lauds each day we have added a special prayer to the intercessions for all those suffering from corona virus and its effects.

Our finances suffered without the cash income from the shop and guesthouse but our brewery was still able to function and our distributor didn’t cease ordering beer from us as online sales remained good during the lockdown. It was good to learn that our finances were probably more robust than we thought and they were able to take this hit, as long as it didn’t go on too long. Our shop was able to re-open in June and this has helped our finances to recover.

Even though it is now permissible for our church to open again the government / Church restrictions are so strict that we wouldn’t be able to conform to them e.g. cleaning regime, stewards, signage and limit on numbers. So our church still remains closed sadly. The guesthouse also remains closed and we are not planning on opening that until the New Year. One particularly difficulty is that we have had a few aspirants and they have not been able to visit. We are considering doing video link (facetime, zoom, etc.) with them.

For the future, once the guesthouse opens, we are going to reduce the number of guests as the lockdown has taught us that our busy guesthouse was too much for us. Also we had two Masses on Sunday, the community Mass and a public Mass, but once the restrictions are lifted we are going to cease having the public Mass and amalgamate it with the community Mass. We have already discussed that with the bishop and he is okay with that.