

Abbey of Echourgnac, end of August 2020

At the beginning of March 2 sisters had to travel and probably brought the virus back with them. In the following days, several symptoms appeared (loss of taste and smell). We asked for tests. Out of 9 sisters who remained, 7 were positive. We had to become very organized with strict containment because the entire community was considered infected with the virus by the health services. We therefore warned the employees who then stayed at home, some of them working from home. The guesthouse was also closed.

The "business", the comings and goings, the noise of machines and cars suddenly disappeared, and the monastery was in silence. It was a healthy experience; nature has reclaimed its rights, with the song of birds and the clean air.

At Chapter, we read Dom Mauro's letter on the pandemic: "Stop, know that I am God". This sentence alone really struck us. Of course, we wanted to stop and pay more attention to God, but for year on end, our pace of daily life took over, this same rhythm even more pronounced in the outside world, and which penetrated our walls.

For a few weeks (before being tested and confined), we regained a simpler pace and lifestyle that we had long wanted. We tasted a fraternal atmosphere through renewed mutual service: we took over the cooking, the bread baking, a whole team worked in the vegetable garden, we created a flower bed in front of the refectory. All this work in common, accomplished calmly and in freedom, gave us momentum, joy.

We gave thanks for the gift of what we experienced living in beautiful nature, spacious places: we partly occupied the guesthouse, frequented the oratory where we could pray before the Blessed Sacrament. We reflected together on the world events.

However, those days had their rough edges. We experienced some concern among the affected sisters, because of the strict confinement imposed on some of them. The experience of strong common life turned into a very individual life; mutual service became heavier.

Our chaplain was hospitalized a few days before Holy Week, then quarantined. We were unable to have any offices during this time. Like all Christians, we were grateful to be able to follow them on KTO, but not everyone was happy with that arrangement. We had to accept that we were not completely unanimous in the way we experienced this time. So much so that at Easter we celebrated the Vigil among ourselves, without a priest and without a Eucharist, but with new fervor.

To date, we can say that symptoms of the virus are over, to a fair extent. A sister with asthma is more tired and sees a pulmonologist because the Covid has caused pleurisy. During July, our doctor imposed a serological test on all of us. The result: 6 positive sisters who had to surround themselves with precautions, retake tests until the laboratory informed us on August 24 that all were finally negative. But this nasty virus can come back, you must learn to live with it, as the doctor tells us.

This period therefore had both its good and bad affects. We were able to experience our littleness, our weakness as creatures and thus put ourselves back in our rightful place before God.

We were able to initiate small things which go in the direction of an integral ecology and which will have a meaning, a future. The main thing for us is to begin a process of conversion.

We felt really connected to the world, to the populations who were going through and are still going through the same ordeals. We keep them in prayer more responsibly.