

## COVID-19: SHARING THE EXPERIENCE

### Monastery of Paix-Dieu

The following text is not a summary but the minutes of community meetings. Rather, it seemed easier and quicker to report the sisters' words directly.

#### A change in our usual lives

- Among us, it was calmer, less precipitation in the corridors, the atmosphere was more fraternal because there was less stress. The fact that we could no longer welcome guests meant that we were together, giving us the sense of being refocused, without being pulled apart by outside calls.
- Fewer exterior activities: no more deliveries, no postman passing by, etc.
- With the absence of our cook who was confined to her home, we enjoyed the benefit from the culinary gifts of two sisters with the surprise of innovative menus.
- On the road and around the monastery: a strange impression, heavy atmosphere, because we heard no more noise. And the wonder of creation could be seen all the more: birds, trees, herbs, flowers.
- With no more orders in the workshops, I cleaned out my computer files, I also worked outside cleaning a wall; it was an opportunity to discover the beauty of a dry stone wall assembled centuries before, the link with those who built and lived here; opportunity to taste the atmosphere of nature around me: Orioles, wild doves, Hoopoes, the first Cicadas. Our living space is beautiful and I was able to taste the fruit of the wood clearing work recently done by some sisters. The containment has allowed us to live a new balance.
- We have adapted our daily life - liturgy, work, economy, hospitality - without too much difficulty since our monastic life is already sufficiently adapted to this form of confined life.
- No guests in the guesthouse, or church, no cook because she was in partial unemployment, no orders for crafts, closed shop, no medical appointments, or other outings usually necessary: all this was new.
- At the beginning of the confinement, an influx of calls, emails, came to us from lonely and anxious people. Then it was calmer, less pressure, life was able to resume with less stress due to not having to meet multiple requests.

#### Perhaps a reminder of what our monastic life should usually be?

- This change in our daily life has made me think of what is often said: "It is better to be than to do" but yet, it is not so easy either, because idleness is the enemy of the soul. And what is sometimes said of the monks and nuns "those useless people" took on all the more force.
- Having presented some suspicious symptoms, I was confined for 14 days to the empty guesthouse. It was an experience of solitude and rest. I enjoyed working during this period (pruning the olive trees, cleaning). I also experienced loneliness but then experienced the joy of reuniting with the community.
- There were no more guests, no more relations with the outside: some things were no longer in circulation, but it was an opportunity to deepen in interiority. Perhaps we will need to keep this rhythm of less hospitality in the future, to preserve the balance of our monastic life?

- Having usually been in charge of the guesthouse, I experienced a change in my work: I replaced our cook, I provided daily service to a sister whose mental health has been affected.
- Without orders for our craft products, ... I took the opportunity to tidy up and catch up.
- What changed was that we were always together: no outings for the sessions that had to be cancelled, no bringing in of workers and craftsmen for repairs or work, on-going formation with external speakers had also to be stopped.
- In a sense, the period we have been living since May 11 with de-confinement is more demanding and constraining especially in the guesthouse and the store: disinfection of premises, wearing masks, limiting the number of people in church, taking registration for Sunday Mass.
- I read a lot about the health situation: it was a way to stay in touch with all the people affected by this virus. We did not have a job in the workshops, and I provided telephone support: some people thought it was a punishment from God. However, as the containment lasted longer and longer, I felt the lack of work and occupations.
- We no longer give a sister an embrace for her feast or for the big liturgical feasts, we no longer express our feelings to another because of the required physical distancing: I miss this.
- At the monastery, the confinement did not change our lives much, unlike most people who had to stay at home.
- People were concerned about our health and were asking for news from us.
- During confinement: no more planes flying overhead, little traffic, a denser silence: a strong sign that something had been changed in our world

## **Anxiety**

- I participated in a session in February and was afraid that I had brought the virus back into the community.
- An anguished time especially at the beginning.
- Worry for members of my family who were exposed as caregivers.
- There have been many deaths and we do not know the future: it is still not over.
- Concern for our economy because during the time of containment and even at the beginning of the de-confinement, we did not have orders for our products: what result will this have on our already fragile economy?
- With this Covid-19, we no longer speak of "3rd age" or "old people" or "seniors" but we are called by a new name: "people at risk"!
- I was worried about the oldest and most fragile sisters in the community: at first we heard that it was the over-80s who were the people at risk, then those over 70, then the 65-year-old sisters and I thought: how far are we going with this?!
- There was also very frequent information from CORREF, the SDM, which at certain times caused a bit of anxiety.
- News about communities that were hard hit by the disease bound us in a communion of prayer.

## **Projects that had to be postponed.**

- My solemn profession, which was to take place on 20th June, had to be postponed because of the danger for the people at risk who wanted to participate and the necessary physical distance that reduced the number of places available in our church.
- The volunteer gardener who was helping in the garden could not come to support us with his skills, I could not go out to buy seeds and plants and the production of the garden was affected.

## **An event that poses the question in us: why Lord?**

- Like all people, we are touched, challenged, questioned by the seriousness of the situation and its consequences that raise questions from every point of view: evil visits us all, worldwide.
- Many articles present us with their thoughts, reflections, ideas, to express what we should think about it, which conclusions we should draw. The wisest reflections are in the most serious journals in every respect: sanitary, moral, scientific, philosophical, religious in the good sense as well as in non-sense. These reflections are truly relevant and interesting, which proves precisely that there is something serious here, and something to be heeded.
- Help those who question us to think of this pandemic not as a punishment (often mentioned) but as a warning or at least a signal to open up to effective research on the causes and remedies to be brought to it: an experience of salvation.

## **The liturgy**

- The absence of guests to share our daily prayer, on Sundays having no assembly, which had previously been so numerous, created a special atmosphere.
- No guests or visitors to the church, it is very relaxing!
- For the liturgy of Holy Week with some rites suppressed or shortened, it was lighter and at the same time I felt a sense of lack.
- I miss the gesture of peace to express the Peace of Christ.
- Wearing the mask at Mass on Sundays or when the congregation is large, it bothers me, and I do not like it very much.

## **Communion with our suffering world**

- It was important to look together at programmes on the health context in France, Europe and the world, to continue to follow targeted and documented news.
- I lived this time of confinement in communion with so many people in the ordeal: the many families living in cramped apartments, sometimes a cause of violence against women and children, the problem of schooling for children when parents were unable to help children do their schoolwork, elderly people deprived of visits, funerals with participants in small numbers or even just a single person from the family, loss of employment for many workers and the opposite, jobs requiring more work with an increased risk in the health field, countries of great poverty affected by the epidemic.
- I thought a lot and prayed for all those affected by this virus, for all the dead, their families, and caregivers. I felt close and in communion through prayer.
- A great communion with those who cared, provided support, assistance to those who could not go out.
- I pray very much for the world, that it will return to God, for the conversion of all of us.
- Telephone help with particular attention to people needing to be listened to, with a need to share what they were going through during confinement.
- The wait for our "Sunday parishioners" who were longing for the resumption of Masses.
- The concern of many people to help us financially and to do it effectively through donations, even small ones.

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