

Living the pandemic in Conyers

During these months of the pandemic, the community has been invited to accept adversity and to embrace our basic monastic values and religious practices more deeply. We experience a greater sense of enclosure which generates a greater sense of stability and unity in the community. We find more opportunities for prayer and lectio divina without distraction, with additional hours for Adoration in our small chapter room. Some of us are being called to increase participation in community service.

We are sensitive to the fact that we are more protected than most people today. In our local county many have tested positive, therefore, we are deliberate in following protocols for safety when we need to go out and when we receive deliveries. We have not gone out for regular medical visits, however with God's grace and the exceptional care and attention given by our infirmary staff, we have not had any serious medical emergencies. Because of the lack of safe travel, we have not been able to be personally present to our daughter houses in Venezuela.

Our isolation, without our regular visitors and retreatants in our church, makes us more aware of ourselves liturgically as a community of brothers, yet many of us miss praying with our extended community of visitors at Mass. Many of us are concerned about family and friends. Considering the sorrow that many of the faithful are experiencing today because they cannot attend Mass or receive the sacraments, leads us to a deeper appreciation of our own sacramental life. Our daily exposure to the afflicted voices in the psalms has united us more intimately in prayer with those who are suffering in the world.

Since we have regrettably let most of our employees go due to our having to close our store, retreat house and food bank, we realize the importance of each brother in keeping the monastery running smoothly. The community's personal involvement in caring for our infirm brothers has increased. We also have been blessed with the presence of four women (two visiting sisters of our Order and two medical professionals) in our infirmary. The fragility of our community because of our age and other health issues is never far from our thoughts.

This is a time for self-reflection on how we use our time, spend money, and use computers. Confronted with the reality of 'scarcity,' makes us not only more thankful, but also more thoughtful in how we buy and use foods, and other items, such as paper products, once taken for granted. Creative uses of technology has enabled us to reach out to the wider community, using online video conferencing for giving retreat conferences, meeting with monastic inquirers and giving spiritual direction.

We look forward to the day when we can re-open our church and our retreat house to our guests and to re-unite at Mass in a renewed and deeper way. Living joyfully a simple, balanced life can be a good witness to our society in this time of social confinement. This can be a grace-filled experience for us and the world if we all learn to abandon ourselves to God and to what he may be saying to us. We all pray for a post-pandemic world with a renewed sense of an interdependent community in the image of our Triune God.