

Covid-19 Sharing of Experience

1) Our 25th Anniversary of foundation.

Towards the end of January we had a couple of community dialogues to discuss how to celebrate our 25th anniversary of foundation which was in fact celebrated on June 11th.

In order to implement the proposals that emerged, we set up a committee of four members, three solemnly professed and a novice.

It should have been a moment of participation both by the superiors invited especially M. Rosaria, founding abbess and others from the Oriens region. In mid-March when the health emergency was raised and the lockdown was implemented in the Philippines as well, we realized that we would not have had any visits from the Order and we would also have to cancel the celebration to be presided over by the bishop for the people of our diocese. We could not deny a certain initial disappointment, but we immediately shrugged off the sadness and decided to celebrate the best we could because the object of our celebration was not ourselves but God's mercy in our lives. The unwearied mercy of God that we have received in the Order became the real theme of the celebration. Because of the lockdown we had much more time to remember and translate the chronicles sent by our foundresses to Vitorchiano during the initial years of our foundation and to accompany each remembered stage of growth both communitarian and personal we made beautiful displays of photos. This remembrance along with the communitarian study of the book of M. Cristiana "Living Wisdom," which allowed us to re-read our history, has helped us to internalize more deeply our Cistercian charism.

On June 11, the community experienced a special grace of unity and peace: we enjoyed the messages from Vitorchiano and our Asian sister houses of Gedono, Macau and Rosary; we had a solemn Mass and a video with the whole history of the Filiation of Vitorchiano from the beginning down to us.

We had also the joy to celebrate two simple profession and we will have the grace to celebrate other two simple professions in the coming months.

2) Work and economy, hospitality

Covid-19 lockdown has greatly affected our economy: the cookie factory has now been almost closed for four months. We did not get discouraged, though, and immediately started a vegetable garden and could already harvest after three weeks since we live in a tropical area. Unlike before we used to buy our vegetables. The farm work can continue (we have a pineapple plantation) but we do not know up to when since the expenses are almost exceeding the income due to Dole policy of not rising the price of the pineapples .

We decided to take care of our gardens ourselves, and unfortunately we had to lay off some workers because we could no longer pay their salaries. We chose to be more frugal in our menu in order to spare as much as we could.

A more flexible work-schedule has allowed us also more time for prayer and lectio, study, other more contemplative activities and quality community sharing. We have also felt compelled to share in the suffering of our neighbors and the poor. We also try to console the many people who are asking for prayers.

The guesthouse has been closed up to now with rare exceptions. This also caused the closing of the gift shop which was a great source of income. Up to now we are able to cover the daily expenses but we do not know until when. Our finances were also overburdened by a major repair of the electrical line damaged by water infiltration and insects. It was an urgent work we could not postpone. People have no money so we really

struggle to sell our cookies. The airports used to be our main product outlets... but they have been closed since March.

Guests have come back to Sunday since the mitigation of the lockdown in July, but they are not as numerous as before. We admire their faith because they come from far away only to attend Mass. Our bishop visited us recently and made us even more aware of the dramatic situation in some cities of our country.

3) Prospect for the Future

The future is quite uncertain. Our major concern is the expenses for health care and repairs which are always demanding in tropical countries. But the effect of the surge of Covid-19 in the Philippines has just taken off with many people losing their jobs and many becoming poorer and poorer. Maybe in a not so far future we will have difficulty meeting our daily expenses... We pray that the providence of God continue to accompany us, and we thank for our friends and especially for our workers who have been particularly generous with us during this time, sharing the little they have.