

COVID 19 – WE SHARE OUR EXPERIENCE

This invisible and confusing trap we call Covid-19 has required that we, like everyone else, obey the lockdown to protect our lives and the lives of others. We have therefore taken great care to keep the necessary distances between people in terms of contacts with the outside world: with the guests at the guesthouse, with the people who come to the monastery store and especially the faithful who share our daily life, liturgical prayer and the Holy Mass. Our community was fortunate to be able to celebrate the Easter rites and to have Mass every day, thanks to the presence of our Chaplain. A real privilege, compared to all those who had to follow the celebrations and the times of prayer only by streaming, locked in their homes or their communities.

Friends of the monastery emphasized to us, that for us it could be almost "natural" to enter this solitude, unlike the world and the dynamics of relationships that characterize social life. But for us, too, this obedience represented a kind of constraint: in work relationships, the necessities of health regulations and the dynamics of communion required by the reception of people who come to the monastery to pray with us. Among all these constraints we have discovered the grace of a freedom that springs not only from the balance and structure of Benedictine life, but also and above all from a dimension of listening and welcoming reality, such as it presents itself in all circumstances, which is truly constitutive of a Christian and monastic vocation.

Prayer has acquired a more interior dimension, and more is linked to a personal choice in Eucharistic adoration, made after Vespers on Friday and Sunday, and in the rosary, prayed in community every evening.

We had the possibility of continuing in good part the program of permanent formation, either through community exchanges, to reflect together on what we were going through, or through video-conference courses, on the themes of Mariology.

Work required a greater effort from us economically, as we no longer had the possibility of selling at home in the store and, in addition, we felt the closure of almost all commercial activities in our city and elsewhere. We therefore thought of setting up an on-line business, which allowed us to sell off the supplies we had and to keep in touch with our customers and the usual guests of the monastery.

Another difficulty to overcome: medical care for the sick Sisters, including a young professed who was receiving chemotherapy. Since she required several outings and contact with the doctors there was a very high risk of catching the virus; we had to take special precautions in addition, to allow her to be treated while preserving the health of the community.

In addition to these initiatives taken to overcome all the constraints that the pandemic brought us, we were able to continue to follow - from afar, of course - the work of the site for the new monastery in Portugal. The construction site of the guesthouse in Palaçoulo (Diocese of Braganza-Miranda) never had to close, thanks to the hard work of the construction company and the favorable circumstance of a contagion that did not significantly affect the rural region where the new Community will settle. The building where the Sisters will begin their lives will be finished, and the key given, by the end of October and the new community is already preparing for the departure, which is scheduled for November. We ask for the support of your prayer for the

Sisters who are preparing for the departure and we take this opportunity to thank the Order for all the help it has given us and will continue to give us for this work.

These months also saw the realization of the project of an annex house, with a view to supporting the monastic presence of Tre Fontane. It was Dom Gueric, at that time Abbot of La Trappe and Father Immediate of Tre Fontane, who launched this idea and this challenge to the lineage of Vitorchiano, in 2019.

Five Communities of our filiation have given their membership and will provide a Sister for this project. The Annex House will begin its adventure during the spring of 2021 and will take the name of: S. Maria alle Acque Salvie; it will be installed in a building behind the Church of the Martyrdom of Saint Paul. This new monastic presence in the city of Rome is warmly supported by the Cardinal Vicar, Mons. Angelo De Donatis, and we are sure that you too will support it with your prayers.

On Ascension Day our Sr. Ilaria made her temporary profession, and we particularly emphasized the community dimension of this event since, because of the Covid, neither her parents nor her friends had the opportunity to participate.

In Italy, from May forward, it was possible to take small 'initiatives' and we opened our church to the faithful after Pentecost - always keeping the restrictions - then the guesthouse and later, our small store: small steps towards a normalization of activities and social relations. In any case it was always with the awareness that, now more than ever, the monastery is a sign of the presence of God in this world and that, even taking the necessary precautions, it is called to open its doors to all those who ask to be welcomed there. In this regard, we received a request from some young women who wanted to discern their vocation to monastic life: at this time we have two young aspirants with us.

Now we are preparing for the solemn profession of Sr. Maria Nicla, which will take place on August 30, the solemnity of the Dedication of our Church: a date which is particularly appropriate for this young nun, who has given a beautiful testimony of belonging to our house. The celebration will be a way for all of us to thank the Lord for all His blessings and for the protection He has given us at this difficult time.