

## **AIGUEBELLE AND CONFINEMENT**

At Aiguebelle, as in many of our monasteries, the confinement imposed by the State has not been a radical novelty, because, unlike civil society on which it was imposed, it is a lifestyle that we chose and which was our daily life; and for our material conditions, we were quite privileged. And yet there have been some effects and consequences for our daily life in our monastic community.

Our guesthouse and store being closed, our sales interrupted and no applicants at the gatehouse, have quite slowed down the activity of many brothers. For some, this was an occasion for more lectio and prayer, a kind of return to basics. For others, it was an occasion to tidy up their workplace and even review the whole organization and presentation of our store, with important work accomplished by ourselves or with external craftsman difficult to manage

The absence of pressure on our whole production section, has given us time in the afternoons for many community exchanges among ourselves, first for redacting our house report for the general chapter, sent but filed without follow-up. But also to share our way of understanding and living this time of disturbance of the whole world by the Covid-19, and to try to decipher what prophetic signs God has placed for us in this totally unexpected event. These exchanges have been beneficial for the building up of our community, underscoring our need to be more attentive, more delicate, more prompt to render service, to help the other. Indeed, the counter-virus is fraternity and solidarity: a dimension to keep for the future. Many have appreciated these exchanges and asked for a follow-up.

In our liturgical life too there were different impacts. We left the church open because there is a distance between the laity and the community. At the morning Mass there were always 4 or 5 persons, as well as at Sunday Vespers, despite the [safety] directives.

On the Sundays in May, and also on May 8th, the memorial of our 7 martyred brothers of Atlas and until Pentecost, we had filmed and transmitted through our internet site, the Sunday community Mass, and we had registered up to 150 [internet] connections, which surpass assistance at our ordinary Sunday celebrations.

During this time of trial we have often brought in to our community prayer (joining ourselves to a prayer drawn up by the diocese), all those affected by the Covid-19, the care-givers, and also all the families often separated from their sick and their dying members. We have received many moving testimonies which motivated our prayer of intercession.

In our community life, despite all, we must note a difficulty of some seeing the virus everywhere and lurking about to reach the brothers, and others who take the situation with more flexibility. It is true that with the presence of many very old brothers, it is a risky situation. But the notion of “social (or physical) distancing” was a question for community life: if I consider my brother as a virus (even potentially) from whom I should protect myself: there is a problem! We have also read in the refectory many deep articles making us reflect on the impact of these events on the consecrated life, and through the internet we have lived with the Church the great moment of the Urbi et Orbi Benediction of Pope Francis, on March 27th.

Thank God we have not had any contemination either within the community or among members of the brothers’ families: God has truly protected His children and we give Him thanks for it.

Afterward, the “deconfinement” was not very simple, and it was necessary to insist a bit to begin again.

We have gradually opened our store, then the guesthouse while taking into account the norms fixed by the State and adapting them to our situation and our capacities. Customers and retreatants returned quickly enough. But the “loss of revenue” from the fact of three months of confinement, estimated by our lay accountant, shows that this year will be economically a bad year. But for now, we can cope.

And we, too, say: “all is grace”.