

Our Lady of Atlas Monastery – Midet

Text for the Order on the Containment Experience

At Our Lady of Atlas, we have lived a strict confinement of ten weeks (from 03/21/2020 to 06/01/2020) without guests or visits, and without the presence of the employees of the monastery.

This unprecedented situation created a much-appreciated ambiance of calm and solitude in the monastery. We found ourselves more available for prayer and manual labor, more open to silence and the word: that of God in lectio divina and that of the brothers during community exchanges. During this time of confinement, each of us felt impelled to turn toward what is essential in our monastic vocation.

Also, this time has allowed us to know each other better and to recognize how much we need each other in community, while our relationships with our closest neighbors have practically disappeared. In our context, in a Muslim country, relationships of conviviality and friendship that we seek to live with our neighbors are an important characteristic of our monastic life. The absence of these relationships has been felt by some as a loss.

That is why, after the strictures of confinement were eased a little, we were happy to meet again at the monastery with our friends and neighbors, and to be invited to take a festive meal with the one or the other, on the occasion of the principal Muslim Festival — Eid El Kebir. Similarly, with great joy we met with our Franciscan Missionary Sisters of Mary in the monastery church. During the confinement they were forced to follow, by skype, the Eucharistic celebration at the monastery, though they live quite near to us. But what we missed most is our Bro. José Luis, gone for some days to Spain to participate in a meeting of the Iberian DIM [Monastic Interreligious Dialog]. He lived the confinement in a monastery there and did not return to us until after an absence of nearly 5 months. With Pope Francis, we are rediscovering “that we need social relationships as well as our community relationship with God (Pope’s message for World Mission Day, May 31, 2020).

As in other monasteries of our Order, the confinement has affected our economy. With the guesthouse being our principal source of revenue, its yield will be almost nothing this year. Thus we will need to draw on our reserves to live. So, we are postponing the implementing of two community projects envisaged before the confinement, namely, a pottery workshop and the installation of a solar heating system. We should note that, during the confinement, the authorities of our town of Medelt, aware of our situation, made donations to the community in the form of food products, which considerably lightened our expenses for food.

As monks, in communion with the Church, it is in prayer that we can come to the aid of humanity in our time, confronted as it is with its true fragility, and that we can carry our tried, tested world.

On the path of faith we advance together in the presence of God with our marvels and our questions: marvels which so many men and women have made possible during this time of the pandemic, as: the testimonies of lives given, of lives offered, in order to accompany and care for those sick with the coronavirus. What little miracles of charity, of solidarity and gratuitous devotion!

For all of this we want to give thanks to God Who is the origin of all the good of which the human being is capable.

At the same time, the pandemic situation, which continues even today, stirs up in us some questions:

- What teachings should be retained from this crisis experience, from this time of trial?
- Are there things to be changed in our way of life at Our Lady of Atlas, in our personal and community life?
- After the pandemic, how to safeguard the benefits of this time of grace?

- What can we do to preserve a less active and dissipated monastic life, more focused on the essential, despite our small number?
- In our contemporary world, where man claims to live without God, where he seeks to replace God, what could the role of monasteries be?
- As persons consecrated to the contemplative life, are we the first to be concerned with giving back to God the first place in our own lives, to begin with, and consequently within our world?
- How can we contribute, in our small way, to making God present in the life of those who frequently come to us: in the heart of human beings?
- How to become true “witnesses” of the Existence of the Living God, ... lighthouses in the night of our world?