

# What is this living in the enclosure?



**1 – Are you accompanying what is happening on a world level with the pandemic of Coronavirus – covid-19? In what way? How do you view this situation?**

Indeed, we are closely united with our sisters and brothers all over the world, who are living this experience of pandemic. Most importantly, we accompany them in prayer and as the Angel of Portugal taught the children, we make of everything we can a sacrifice in reparation. Our Sisters come from various nations on three different continents. So, from our cloister here in Fatima, we are quite naturally and spiritually in solidarity with the whole world in

this moment of universal suffering.

We cannot help but recall that last year at this time, April 15 precisely, the whole world watched as the treasured Cathedral of Notre Dame burned in Paris. It was Monday of Holy Week. A photo we saw showed the debris from the collapsed roof lying at the base of the Pietà statue. Mary seemed to be saying: “Behold My Son and His Church.” Now, one year later, again we are in the holy season of Lent and the whole world is engulfed in this threat of spreading pandemic.

We see this crisis as an opportunity. Through suffering, through the Cross comes new life. On the one hand, the list of our transgressions is far too long now and still, we cannot seem to hear what Our Lady said in October 1917: “Do not offend God anymore because He is already so much offended.” Some have likened this crisis to the punishments that God, in His Mercy, had to permit in the Old Testament to His chosen people, when they disobeyed.

On the other hand, what we notice in these days is a great silence around us. Our door bell is almost silent; the campo de futebol is silent; the street in front is almost silent and the absence of pilgrims in Fatima leaves a great silence and stillness. The deepest silence is the silence of the Sacred Liturgy. This silence is heartrending to the faithful. We feel it deeply. Yet, we believe and hope that in this silence God will speak to the hearts of all His children. For this we pray!

Already, we have learned of so many acts of charity being done by people all over the world. We ourselves have experienced this kindness and charity. I take this opportunity to thank all who have shown concern and offered their help at this time in particular to our Dominican Fathers.

**2 - In a general way, how was your adaptation to the life in the enclosure? Was it easy? What were the principal difficulties?**

The vocation to the enclosed monastic way of life begins with a Call from God. It is a gift of God, a special grace to be 'love at the heart of the Church'. The cloistered contemplative life is first and foremost a life of continual Praise of God. For this, God chooses whom He wills (Jn15:16) and not for any merit of their own. We are called apart to sing the praises of God here on earth, even as our sisters and brothers are occupied with their many cares and concerns of life in the world. The enclosure is an essential means towards the goal of union of the soul with God, Who is Love.

The adjustment to this way of life has its challenges. Truly, it is an uprooting from a pattern of life in the world to a new and much disciplined way of life in the cloister. Yet, God's Call is always accompanied by Grace and so, little by little, the adjustment is made. Leaving one's family is not easy. Some have come from smaller families and some from very large families, but here too, God grants the graces needed to grow in supernatural love for them. Natural love always remains but now we love them in God! Christ promised that those who leave mother and father, sister and brother and even home and country for the sake of the Kingdom of God, will be repaid a hundred fold. He keeps His promises.

### **3 - In the cloister how are the practical questions of day to day, of shopping, visits to the doctors treated?**

We count on the help of friends to do the shopping, but at times it is necessary for the Sisters to make the purchases. Presently, we have the essential goods and products from our kitchen garden. In normal times we go out to consult the doctor or dentist. If one of our Sisters requires special care we count on assistance from persons who come to the monastery. We are very grateful to them for this. Like everyone else, we wait to see what will happen in the next weeks and months. We pray and we trust that God will provide.

### **4 - The Sisters, like the majority of us, are enclosed, but united with family. But many persons are living this moment alone, because family is far away, because they normally live alone but now cannot go out, because they are displaced in terms of work, because they are quarantined for reasons of health ( in their homes or even in a place alone). What message can you send through this newspaper, apart from contacts by telephone and by other new means like internet?**

This time of necessary 'enclosure' for the general population is difficult. All of a sudden activities outside the home – and there may be many - must cease. While God is permitting this great scourge of pandemic, He is also providing abundant graces for His children.

For families there is the grace of discovering or rediscovering the joy of being together and having the time to share memories and to get to know each other better. God wants our families to be united and where it's needed to be reconciled. He wishes them to discover the beauty and the strength and the joy of those bonds of family that He Himself has created. These are utterly unique and irreplaceable.

For those living alone in their homes there are also special graces. There is a deeper sharing in the Passion of Christ as He entered Gethsemane. The Gospel tells us that, He went on alone to pray: "Father let this cup pass from Me. Yet, not My will but yours be done." (Mk 14: 36) For those who must remain in their homes alone...more prayer...more union with the Father for the salvation of the world. For this, you are called at this time. We pray also that the Holy Angels will assist the elderly and those living alone just as the Angel came to Our Lord in the Garden to strengthen him (Lk 22: 43).

For those whose home is under the stars, who have no house to become their enclosure and for those who live in refugee camps and prisons where conditions are impossible for 'enclosure' we pray that they too will receive particular graces in these times.

Even with its many difficulties and unknowns, let us give thanks for this experience of temporary 'enclosure'. May it bear fruit, fruit that will last. (Jn 15: 16)

## **5 - What counsels would you give to someone who now lives in the "enclosure"?**

### **1 - Order**

One element of our monastic life is order. There is a structure and order to our enclosed life that lends a tranquil rhythm to each day. Without this, the peace, the silence and joy would be in peril. For those who are now obliged to live 'enclosed' in their homes, whether with family or individually try to establish some structure in your days and keep to it. Times of prayer, especially the Rosary and even a brief time for silence could be part of the day. Once a week, as family, come together to read the Gospel and share your reflections on the Word of God. This is very enriching for families and a means of getting to know and understand each other better. For those who are alone this can even be done virtually with family members at a distance.

### **2 - Offering**

Here, in Fatima we live this moment of suffering and sacrifice on holy ground. With such a privilege, there is also an obligation. Therefore, offer everything in the spirit of Fatima: 'O Jesus, it is for love of You, for the conversion of sinners and in reparation for the sins committed against the Immaculate Heart of Mary.' What God wants is the conversion of hearts. In these times, life is rich with opportunities for sacrifice. Give all, surrender all to God that "those most in need" may find Him again.

### **3 - Confidence**

"Be not afraid!" - Love rather than fear

Naturally many persons feel afraid. Fear often arises from the unknown. With this pandemic there are many unknowns. In the present circumstances there is the fear of how long it will last or who will be the next to be affected. Or, if I am living alone, who will care for me if I become ill. Or, how can I support my family without work? All of these fears are normal and at the same time related to the unknown. In your prayer name them and then give them to Our Lady, asking Her to place them straight into the Heart of JESUS, through His open side. Ask Jesus to exchange all your fears with His love. When someone asks: "What can we do to help?" My simple reply is: "Pray and Love one another." This is a time of great suffering, in which the whole human family is sharing. It therefore becomes a time for love, to allow the love of Christ to direct our lives and to live this Calvary, which in His mercy, He asks us to share. In this way, with the help of Our Lady, each day will become like an Easter day!

### **4 - Prayer**

We are called here to praise God and to intercede for the needs of the Church and the whole world. The heart of our holy Father St Dominic embraced the poor and the needy, especially those who did not yet know Christ and those who had wandered from the Truth. A special heritage of the Dominican Order is the Holy Rosary. In these times of pandemic the Rosary will sustain us, as it did for so many Catholics during times of persecution and absence of the Sacraments. Our Lady of the Rosary of Fatima, pray for us!