Voices of Sisters
Coronavirus
Spirituality



Dzukou Valley, Nagaland, India (Unsplash/Arindam Saha)



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A few days ago, a neighbor came to our house asking, "Sister, do you have Mass in your convent? I want to receive Communion. It is going to be five months since I received Communion."

I noted the sadness on her face. Lucky for her, we had arranged for Mass the next day, the feast of Assumption and Indian Independence Day.

Her pleading eyes stuck in my heart. I thought of all my Catholic neighbors, many of them participants at daily Mass. And there were some homebound persons to whom we took Communion each Sunday. It was a moment they longed for every weekend.

The situation around us had changed suddenly. Since the first lockdown in March this year in India, and the subsequent lockdowns throughout the state, they have been longing for the sacrament of Communion.

Many religious are fortunate to have confession and Communion in their communities, observing the COVID-19 protocols. For others living in the villages, it may not be possible. They may not have the Eucharist, but they spent time in prayer.

Listening to many people over the phone, I affirmed to myself that the world is moving on the wheels of their consistent prayers: Rosary, Divine Mercy rosary, Psalm 91, Psalm 50 ... they continue to pray and seek God's mercy and blessings for humanity.

Though we have had all three of our Book Centers open for a month, in this small state of Goa, we still find time to pray two-and-a-half hours each day. Actually, we make it happen. Because it is the moment we take ourselves and humanity to the presence of the Lord.

It is a time for healing for our own lives, for nature, for the world itself.

Lockdown helped me discover the growth of "other-centeredness" in most of the people as a whole. As the lockdown began, the most often-heard query over the phone was "Do you have provisions? Do you need help?" People were helping one another in shopping so not everyone needed to be out in the market. These were all busy people who did not have time earlier to exchange a word of greeting as they hurried to work and back.

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In our community, we found a relaxed atmosphere from the hitherto normal busy life, dashing to the three Book Centers each morning with the noonday meal. I remember a sister asking, with a broad smile lighting her face, while we were at recreation, "How relaxed we are now that our Book Centers are closed?"

Before the lockdown, it was at breakneck speed each morning that we completed the Eucharist, made our personal hour of prayer, prepared our food and dashed off to our workplaces. We even forgot to be kind at times.

I feel God provided us with a time to take a break and look at one another with love and concern.

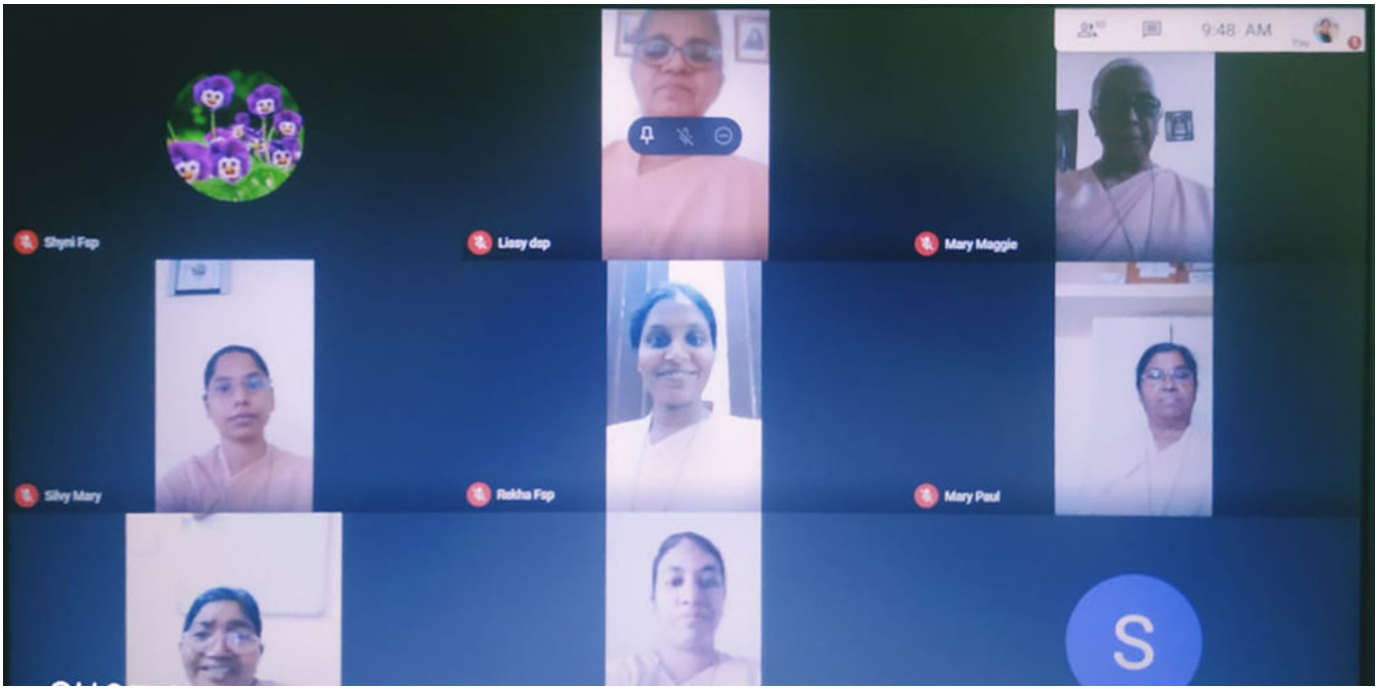
Coming out of morning prayer and meditation one day, I heard another senior sister asking with a broad smile, "Did you hear the chirping of the birds this morning, while we were at prayer?" The truth was that we were so immersed in our plans for the day we never heard the bird, which always visited us.

If nature is cleansed of pollution thanks to "vehicle-free roads," our life, too, began to return to the gentle, nurturing atmosphere that once reigned our lives.

The atmosphere looks free of any pollution as the traffic has reduced or stopped altogether.

"I can see the distant mountains with green carpet lawns," one friend told me over the phone one day — affirming that the air was clear and pure. I could sense a torrent of joy in her words.

Global pandemic lockdown has been a period of discovering how many simple things of life we had taken for granted. What once I saw as tiring and cumbersome has now become beautiful, and we miss these things in life: going out to work, walking with a friend, shopping in a mall, spending leisurely time outdoors with community or friends.



Sr. Lissy Maruthanakuzhy (top row, center) shares a reflection on Jesus Master Truth for the Pauline Family in India, on the second day of the Triduum in preparation for the feast of Jesus Divine Master on October 24, 2020. (Provided photo)

The lockdown took me by surprise. It made me understand the importance of grabbing every opportunity to get to do something I love and not save it for the future.

It is continuing to teach me that I can live contentedly with few essential things by using them wisely.

The pandemic has helped me appreciate spending quality time with my dear ones — simply at our homes, not at a picnic spot. It has helped me connect with my friends, extended family, and the people who truly matter to me, and strengthen our bond. It has helped me to value people and the time I spend with them.

It has also given me time to discover and reflect on myself physically, mentally and spiritually. It has been a time for many of us to explore dormant talents like painting, flower making and the like.

Pandemic made us understand the uncertainty of our lives when a dear one is being separated from us suddenly.

Hence, I experience a life lived in a continual conversion. I can feel a new light dawning on me and around me that wealth is not all that counts but our health and well-being. It has made us kinder and more considerate of ourselves and others, and given us an assurance that we can overcome any and every circumstance if we stand together and care.

Lockdown helped me discover the other-centeredness, the love and care existing in the neighborhood; the importance of living one day at a time, making the most use of the present before me; and enjoying the relationships that exist around me.