News



The Jan. 27 fire at the guesthouse of the Trappist Monastery of St. Mary Mother of the Church in Palaçoulo, Portugal, started in a fireplace and then reached various divisions. The roof needs to be repaired as a matter of urgency, given the possibility of rain. (Courtesy of Trappist Monastery of St. Mary Mother of the Church)



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The usual morning of prayer and work at the Trappist Monastery of St. Mary Mother of the Church in Palaçoulo, Portugal, near the border with Spain, was disrupted Jan. 27 when a fire started to spread in the guesthouse where the nuns currently live while the monastery is under construction. They are a community of 10 nuns and three postulants.

The fire broke out at 6:15 a.m. and spread quickly from the fireplace. It "totally or partially destroyed the central area of the guesthouse, where we currently have our rooms, offices, warehouse and confectionery packaging," the nuns announced in a press release sent to journalists and confirmed by phone to GSR by the mother superior, Sr. Giusy Maffini.

"The flames quickly rose to the roof and we had to watch helplessly, praying and waiting for the fire department to intervene," the nuns wrote. The extinguishing of the fire also rendered the rooms unusable due to the destruction of the roof and rampant water.

The chapel remained intact, as did the novitiate rooms and the five rooms already in use as a hostel. "It was a surprise to find hanging the white habit ... which one of us had just sewn the day before, intact in the middle of the corridor hit by flames, smoke and water," they said.

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The bishop of their diocese came as soon as he heard about the fire, and the visit was comforting for the religious community. In a memo sent to journalists, Bishop Nuno Manuel dos Santos Almeida of Bragança-Miranda appeals "to the generosity of families, communities, companies and institutions, so that in the Lenten journey that is approaching together we can help to rebuild the guesthouse."

But the bishop wasn't the only one who showed up, as other people wanted to be present at this moment of misfortune. "Some brought food, others started picking up the rubble, others simply wanted to be close to us and encourage us," sisters said. "In short, we saw a great display of closeness and generosity."

"We are experiencing the Lord's providence, which awakens in the hearts the desire to participate in the reconstruction of this place, which is not just for us nuns, but is the home of all those who seek God."

In addition to receiving monetary donations for the construction of the house, sisters have some products for sale, such as various delicacies of their own making, rosaries, key rings and books.



In the space that has now burned down, the nuns and postulants of the Trappist Monastery of St. Mary Mother of the Church in Palaçoulo, Portugal, celebrate Christmas 2023. (Courtesy of Trappist Monastery of St. Mary Mother of the Church)

These nuns came originally from Italy, from the Trappist Monastery of Our Lady of St. Joseph in Vitorchiano, near Rome, to found this monastery in Portugal, where they have been since 2020.

The Trappist monastery's guesthouse, where individuals and small groups can spend days on retreat, resembles a small village typical of this region of northern Portugal. The monastic community lives from its work linked to the land and its products, made entirely by the sisters who live in the monastic cloister.

On the official website of the Trappist monastery, the nuns send a message of thanks to God "for protecting us and the firefighters during the fire" and to all " known and unknown people" for the fraternal gestures they have received these days.

"In the midst of our world of rivalry and war, this fraternity is a shining sign of hope."