



The **VINE**

News from the Secular Discalced Carmelite Community in England and Wales



June 2020



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Deadline for contributions to the next Vine: Monday 5 October 2020

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LETTER FROM OUR NATIONAL PRESIDENT

Dear Fellow Carmelites,

These last few weeks have been filled with the Holy Spirit but not always in ways that we can see or understand. During lock-down, the spaces opening out in our less frenetic lives are letting the light shine in surprising ways. For some of us, past events, dreams and old anxieties emerge into the light, for the Holy Spirit to heal and calm when we bring them to Christ in prayer. For others it brings a time of peace and seclusion with the opportunity to glory in Christ as the firstborn of all creation. For many of us the loss of real contact with family and friends is somewhat mitigated by virtual meetings, and the loss of Mass by live-streamed masses from all over the world. Prayer unites all these aspects of lock-down life.

Teresa tells us that our prayer is evident through 'good works, good works', for we often become concerned that our prayer isn't good enough. What does 'good enough' mean? Perhaps our culture is such that we are driven to achieve, to measure progress, to be perfect in our limited understanding of that word, but now we are more restricted and are learning to accept what comes.

From our prayer as Carmelites many 'good works' are evident, much energy is flowing and creativity abounds, as Deborah reveals in her article on the pandemic that follows in this issue of *The Vine*. It is as if the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are being expressed through our Secular Carmelite Order, together with the friars and the sisters.

The gifts of knowledge and understanding are given to us through sharing Fr Matt's talks on Prayer and the SELS conferences. We are offered counselling and support from our family, friends, fellow Carmelites and the friars but also through gentle inner promptings of the Holy Spirit. Our communities and groups are imbued with courage to carry on their meetings and other activities by all means at their disposal. Individuals and groups are thereby growing in wisdom, piety and fear of the Lord through a deepening relationship with God.

On that heartening note I love you and leave you. Enjoy this issue of *The Vine*.

Annette

RESPONDING TO THE PANDEMIC

Thank you Deborah Van Kroonenburg for preparing the following useful summary - Ed

This is a difficult time for everyone but we have been trying to adapt to changing circumstances. Here are a few ideas from the experience of Carmelite groups and communities.

• Secular Carmel monthly meetings

We have found new and creative ways to keep in touch so that we can continue as community in this time of crisis. Each group or community decides on how it will work for them, for example,

Have a social media meeting using one of the available programmes. (People have used 'Skype', 'Zoom,' 'Jitsy' and 'Teams'). You can send out invitations beforehand and have a break for silent prayer in the middle of the session. It is only possible for one person to talk at a time and this is harder than normal conversation, so limit the time and input. Those without suitable devices may phone in to the meeting.

Have regular phone conversations between members.

Have a set time when you know the group/community will be praying.

Send letters to isolated, elderly or sick members.

• National Events, Retreats, Conferences

All planned retreats, meetings and conferences have been suspended for the rest of the year. Information on future events will be given out as soon as possible.

In the meantime regions, groups and communities are encouraged to view online resources for live streamed and recorded talks. These are available from the Carmel websites at Boars Hill and the Centre for Applied Carmelite Spirituality. As a replacement for this year's Regional Days Fr Matt is also giving eight talks on St Teresa and Prayer on Mondays at 10.00 and 20.00 (except on May 25 when the morning talk will exceptionally be at 11.am) at St Joseph's Church, Gerrards Cross - <https://www.stjosephs.org.uk/Live> (and see also the links on page 18 of this issue).

The Carmelite Friars Provincial Chapter will take place in a virtual form starting July 27. Your prayers are welcome for this important event.

• Contacting communities and groups

To make contact with local Carmelite groups and communities please access the contact sheet on our website, leave your information and a member will contact you. Each group makes their own arrangements for meetings; which are accessed by invitation only.

INVITATION TO OCDS ZOOM MEETINGS

At Fr Liam's suggestion, about 15 Seculars from five groups (four that meet at Boars Hill and one from St Austell group in Cornwall) meet with him once a fortnight for an hour's Zoom meeting. One of us introduces the session with a short reflection, then we share our responses in the light of our lockdown situation. We enjoy meeting others from different communities and find this informal and confidential sharing of thoughts and experiences to be inspiring and mutually supportive.

There is no commitment to attend; these meetings do not replace but enrich our regular community meetings.

The friars would welcome members from other Secular Order communities and groups, so if you would like to join a meeting like this, please contact Annette.

NEWS FROM THE REGIONS

- London Region remote day of recollection

By April it was already clear that the London region wouldn't be able to meet on 6 June for its scheduled Day of Recollection, so we started planning for a remote regional day which would include all those elements of our usual days of recollection that lent themselves to being done remotely. In many cases, that meant relying on computer technology to download a video, or use the Zoom video-conferencing app, or watch the live-streamed Mass from Kensington Carmelite Church, but we did everything possible so that those without computers could join in, distributing to them a pre-recorded audio CD and a text of Fr Kelvin Ekhoegbe's video talk, and giving them the possibility of phoning in to a Zoom meeting to listen to our Morning Prayer and to the afternoon discussion of Fr Kelvin's talk.

For the afternoon discussion on Zoom, we had 22 participating by video and 5 phoning in. If we add in those who just downloaded the video talk and watched the live-streamed Mass, or relied on texts and a CD at home, the overall attendance was in the same 35-40 range as our normal days of recollection. Fewer chose to share their lunch on Zoom or spend the time of silent prayer at a Zoom meeting (which works surprisingly well in providing companionship in prayer) but those activities, too, went towards a day that renewed our fellowship and refreshed us for what we hope will be the last few months of isolation.

We are enormously grateful to Fr Kelvin for giving us a talk of such substance and sincerity and for explaining more about St John of the Cross during our discussion.

The video of Fr Kelvin's talk, *Freedom to Love*, can be downloaded directly at <https://vimeo.com/424581851> and a beautifully produced and slightly abridged text version can be downloaded from the Secular Carmelite website at http://www.carmeldiscalcedsecular.org.uk/uploads/1/1/1/0/11105731/freedom_to_love.pdf

Mark Courtney OCDS, Regional Representative

- **Immaculate Heart of Mary, Worcester**

Our group started in January 2004 when the Hereford group had become too big and needed to split. Barbara Heitzman became leader of the new group and they met at St George's in Worcester. There were four or five regular attendees. In April 2005 the group moved to Our Lady Queen of Peace in St. John's, Worcester and continued to meet there until October 2010. As the Saturday morning Mass was then discontinued, they decided to move back to St George's. They continued with four or five regular attendees, not necessarily the same ones as in 2004.

In January 2013 they were joined by three members of the Birmingham (Maryvale) group who all lived in the Evesham area and had decided to transfer to Worcester as a Saturday meeting was more convenient for them and also much closer to home. In March 2017 Barbara handed over the leadership of the group to Christine Harvey (one of the former Birmingham group members). Since then, two of our fully professed members have sadly died and one has become unable to attend meetings any more. However, we gained two new members; one of whom would have been making final promises and the other first promises at the West Midlands Regional Day on 2nd May this year. We have also been joined by a fully professed member who transferred from one of the Oxford groups when she moved to Malvern in 2018. So we are a nice strong group at present We still meet on the second Saturday of the month.

In August 2019, the group moved again, this time to St. Joseph's in Malvern. The main reason for this move was that the location was more central for the current members, but also because of the excellent facilities there and Mass, followed by Exposition and confessions, at 10am. We had our last meeting on 14th March, just before the lockdown, but have continued to keep in touch by post, phone and email. Most of us are able to participate in Holy Mass online. Thanks to one of our members, we now have a Zoom meeting booked for 13 June when we are looking forward to seeing each other again. Hopefully, we will continue our Zoom meetings until it is safe to resume normal meetings.

Christine Harvey OCDS, Group Leader

• East Anglia Region

Like everyone the world over, we in East Anglia are having to get used to being without Mass and the sacraments. We're having to get used to being without our family and friends. The sense of loss has been almost palpable and yet, as Fr Matt says in the prayer he gave us, it is also proving to be a 'happy night' in unexpected ways.

Who would have thought when we were following the Amazon Synod last autumn that we would be sharing the experience of the peoples of that region, being months without the Eucharist? Or to be identifying with the enclosed religious more closely in the new dimension of separation? Or learning at first hand to a small degree how those with autism, like my friend's son, may experience their isolation? If it's done nothing else, it's given me time to reflect!

Of course it's caused us to make significant alterations to how we live and how we are, as much in our Secular communities as in our families. Whilst we haven't been able to meet physically in our communities, we've been able to overcome some of the problems of distance by coming together in virtual meetings. It's not the same but it does mean we can meet again in prayer and socially too, both so important just now.

Some of us have been able to attend Mass online and though it can't replace a physical presence, it has been for me surprisingly intimate and an unexpected blessing. Here in Norwich, our Cathedral has been live-streaming daily Mass since lock-down began and it's proved to be very popular locally and internationally.

In May, a statue of Our Lady of Mt Carmel appeared in full view of the camera, just to the right of the altar. This statue has a lovely story attached to it. It spent many years in the garden of Jean, a member of the Third Order O. Carms in Norwich. Every year she gave it a fresh covering of emulsion and in the winter she put a hat and coat on it for extra protection, but as the years went by, the weather took its toll. When Jean died, she left the statue to another parishioner who put it her greenhouse to give it some shelter and started looking for someone to restore it. She was put in touch with a local restorer who set about the work with great style. Our Lady is now resplendent in gold from head to toe and is there for the world to see. I've included two 'before and after' photographs on the next page.

I like to think people will see the statue and ponder as she did.

Joan MacInnes OCDS, Regional Representative



Postscript

Mike Smith one of the Quidenham Secular Group, has been studying and preparing for the Priesthood in Rome. He was ordained to the Diaconate on Wednesday 17th June 2020.

If we can keep him in our thoughts and prayers please.

- **St Elizabeth of the Trinity, Nottingham**

Within two weeks of my being elected president we were in lock-down! However thanks to Zoom we now have a weekly morning prayer session on a Friday which is well attended, normally six or more of us. Some of our community have also used Skype as well as Zoom to increase contact.

More importantly we have now sorted out a way of doing our group meetings on the second Saturday of the month on Zoom. We all attend in the morning for prayer followed by discussion of St John of the Cross. In the afternoon those in Formation meet separately online and those of us in final promises stay together on Zoom.

We have found that in some ways it has been a positive experience but we are of course all looking forward to meeting up as soon as we can.

Martin Hopkinson OCDS, President

- **St Austell Group**

On the 16 January, we had the great joy of Anne Hempleman making her First Promise. The ceremony took place during Mass and was followed by a reception where we were joined by some members of the parish. Sadly, this time of joy was followed by one of sadness when our friend Mollie Cundy died. Mollie was received into Formation last June and was a much loved and valued member of our small group. On a happier note, we have three enquirers, though the Aspirants' Programme has had to be put on hold until we are able to meet together again.

The period of lock-down has been a time of mixed feelings for us. We have all missed being together for our monthly meetings, but, on the other hand it has been like a prolonged retreat and has given us an opportunity to spend more time in prayer and spiritual reading. On the meeting days, we have followed our normal programme as far as possible in our homes, following the same readings and discussing them afterwards by email. We also spent our time of silent prayer and Vespers at the usual time. It was good to know that though we were not physically present we were spiritually united. I hope it will not be much longer before we can meet together in person.

Joan Brown OCDS



Anne Hempleman (second from the right) made her First Promise on 16 January 2020.

- St Luke and St Thérèse Wincanton

I am struck above all since the shut down by the awareness that we are all striving to live out our Carmelite vocation in isolation both from our communities and from our parish churches. I thought that this would be very difficult but as the time has gone on I have seen it as a time not only of great suffering, for the world, be it bereavement, sickness, loss, anxiety or uncertainty about the future, but also of joy, hope and a renewed trust in the Lord. A favourite text of mine has come to the fore again, 'I will allure her and lead her into the desert and there I will speak to her heart' (Hosea).

This withdrawal into a space, not of our choosing, into a place of silence and solidarity with the pain of the world is very powerful. for me. It is a reminder that every day is a preparation for letting go of all that I love and cherish on earth. But the Feast of Pentecost is a reminder that the Spirit of the Risen Lord is breathing fresh life into the world moment by moment.

I am very aware of the call to silent prayer and the knowledge that all over the world we are united in the Heart of Christ. It is such a strength and support to know that all my Carmelite sisters and brothers are praying morning and evening,(probably during the wakeful nights too!) the lynchpin being the Divine Office and our times of meditation.

We have had wonderful talks from Fr Matt and from others for those who have been able to access them, Masses streamed online and the most glorious May weather for years. We may not have been able to be with our families and friends but people have found so many ways to help others. Here in our village, as in others, friends and neighbours have gone out of their way to cook, shop, and respond to others' needs.

We have had the great sadness in our community during this time of shutdown as two of our members have lost their husbands. Michael, the husband of Margaret Goldschmidt died recently, very suddenly collapsing beside her with the Covid virus with complications caused by Guillain-Barré syndrome , despite having no underlying illness. He went into hospital and she was unable to say goodbye or see him again because of the virus. Margaret has been so courageous in coping with the suddenness and shock of his death and so grateful that he was able to receive the Last Rites before he died. Her three married children have been a great support .

Olive Saffioti also lost her husband Sam a couple of weeks ago to cancer. She had been devotedly caring for him for many months and they had their golden wedding anniversary last year. It was a huge loss but he died very peacefully in their own home and her two daughters were there to support her.

During this time of lock-down Barbara Smith our President has been wonderful in sending us updates of each of the community by email and she phones us regularly to check that we are all behaving! Who knows when we will meet again either in our churches or in our communities but I personally feel so grateful for all I have received during these weeks.

Caroline Dawnay OCDS

- **The Holy Trinity and Our Lady of Doncaster**

Thank you to Patricia Haigh, President of the Doncaster OCDS group, for including this text of a talk given by Mother Mary of the Resurrection at Kirk Edge Monastery, Sheffield, in July 2019 - Ed

Every year the Doncaster Community holds one of its meetings at the Carmelite Monastery of the Holy Spirit, Kirk Edge, Sheffield. Members of the Third Order of Carmel of the Ancient Observance (O Carm) are usually invited to join us, and this year was no exception. The Right Rev Ralph Heskett, Bishop of Hallam, spent part of the day with us.

Shortly after our arrival, Mother Mary of the Resurrection gave a talk to the visiting members of the secular orders. This was followed by morning prayer in the chapel, then lunch, after which Father Andrew Browne, our Spiritual Advisor, heard confessions. At 2pm, Mass was concelebrated by Bishop Ralph and Father Andrew. During Mass, our promises and vows were renewed. Mother Mary's talk dwelt on what she called 'basic things', and a brief summary follows.

Mother began by reminding us that ten years ago the relics of St Thérèse of the Child Jesus came to the monastery and members of the Third Order joined with members of the Secular Order to carry the relics into the chapel. She went on to say:

“Before I entered the monastery I thought that life in Carmel was a simple and pleasant progress from Mansion to Mansion. I soon found out how mistaken I was and also that I was very critical. After two weeks here as a postulant, I wrote a letter to my prioress advising her that the organisation of our vegetable garden was not producing worthwhile crops. After some time she sent for me and asked why I had come to Carmel. ‘I came to be a hermit,’ I said. ‘You came to do God's will’, she said. That was all, but my good prioress had given me a programme for the whole of my life.

The first paragraph of our Primitive Rule, which we all, Third Order Carmelites, Secular Carmelites and enclosed Carmelites have bound ourselves to follow, states that, we are to ‘Live in obedience to Jesus Christ’, or to ‘Live in allegiance to Jesus Christ’. So our first obligation is to follow in the footsteps of Jesus who told us so

many times that He came not to do his own will but the will of his Father who sent him. 'Behold I come to do thy will. My meat is to do the will of my Father in Heaven.' The will of God, of course, is not just for us, as members of our order, it is for everyone. Our Blessed Lord made this very plain: 'Whoever does the will of my Father in Heaven, is my mother and sister and brother.'

Like every postulant I found out very quickly that the life in Carmel was just that. Very simple but very difficult. Every moment of every day is an obedience to the will of God. There is no let-up. The bell which is the voice of God for us, calls us to rise, to prayer, Mass, to the refectory, to the Divine Office, recreation and work. We are to obey promptly, and without complaint. Every hour of every day can be a sacrifice of our self-will. There is the martyrdom of love and the gift of ourselves, a prayer and a suffering, which we offer for souls, for the Church, for the world. When we are visited by our friends and family they tell us that they sense an atmosphere of peace and silence. We have been told that this is the fruit of the willing acceptance of suffering.

But to all followers of Christ, God gives the same opportunity of accepting the Cross. In secular life there are constant opportunities when we are asked to give up our preferences, or for the sake of peace or to accept the will of another. One day we were talking to a local farmer. He was telling us that he was taking a holiday, a rare occurrence. 'All my life I have wanted to go to Austria to see the Alps,' he said, ;but we are going to France.' We asked him, 'Why France?' He answered, with a little smile, 'My wife wants to go to France.'

The silence which we practise in Carmel is intended to help us to be recollected, but to be recollected throughout a long day is far from easy. Indeed the silence can often be a source of suffering. Having no television to distract us, or companion to relieve the tension, little fears, worries and obsessions can become a mental torment. These can be worries about our health, irritations over the imperfections of our sisters or envy of their spiritual state, anxiety about our family. My own problem was a fear of reading in public because I had a stammer. These can enslave the mind and upset our peace. We have our work and times of recreation, and above all we have the Mass and the sacraments and the beautiful prayers of the Divine Office, but even these can fail sometimes to overcome the dominating thought. We see ourselves very helpless and hopeless. Ultimately, all we can do is plead with God. 'Please help me.' It seems that God leaves these little imperfections to help us to rely wholly on Him, and to heal the deeper roots of our pride when we recognise we can do absolutely nothing without His help. A very young postulant told me that she was humble. Maybe she was, but many years have to pass for all of us before we realise that we are also very proud.

The presence of Our Blessed Mother is almost tangible in Carmel. In any difficult circumstance, if we make the effort to turn to her with a 'Hail Mary', or even just a quick look, she is there to calm us and restore our peace. We all experience that she never fails to help us.

In the first sentence of Chapter Eight of *The Way of Perfection* St Teresa tells us, 'Let us now come to the detachment which we must practise, for if this is carried out perfectly it includes everything else.' This is a powerful statement and rich in promise, but so difficult to practise. When we entered we thought we had left everything for God.

We soon find that we have brought our attachments with us. As our Holy Mother reminds us in Chapter Ten and St John of the Cross writes in Chapter 20 of Book 3 of the *Ascent* 'the spiritual man must look carefully to it that his heart ... begin not to hold upon temporal things'. In another place he warns us to take care that we do not become attached to a 'book or a cell'.

I loved my cell which was warm and cosy with a beautiful view. Every year we spring clean our cell, washing walls, windows, polishing woodwork, airing our blankets, scrubbing the floor. One spring day my Prioress asked me to spring clean my cell that same day. I was delighted, enjoying my work, thinking with satisfaction of the spotless cell I would soon enjoy. But at the end of the day my Prioress called to see me and announced that a postulant was coming tomorrow and that she was giving her my cell. It was hard to obey with generosity, but my Prioress was giving me something much more valuable than a clean cell. In secular life and for us in Carmel it takes many such acts of generosity before we possess that beautiful freedom which our father, St John of the Cross, desires for us. The things which we hold tightly are precious to us, and detachment is so painful, but when at last we are really glad to see our sister overreaching us in the path of perfection, or occupying a position in community which we have coveted, then we know that it is all worth it, for the peace is a peace which passes all understanding and which nothing, and no one, can take away from us. Our Blessed Lord promised that he would leave His peace to us.

Example is better than precept. Father Browne asked Mother about her parents. Mother told us that her parents were excellent Catholics, but she said, 'My mother could not accept my vocation to Carmel. The year before I entered was a difficult one, because we all suffered with her, as she struggled to accept it. But shortly before the day I was due to leave home, she said, 'I have had my Gethsemane.' It was the 14th of April when I left home, and a fresh Spring day. As she took me to the door to give me her last kiss it seemed to me, as it were, that she was opening the arms of her soul to God. 'It's a lovely day to give your daughter to God,' she said. That was my last memory and one which has inspired me and given me courage all my life.'

IS YOUR COMMUNITY CANONICALLY ESTABLISHED?

Annette writes:

I have been asked to present a Zoom report on the Secular Order on 23rd July, before the Provincial Chapter, and would like to give an update on the number of communities that are canonically established. From reports in back issues of The Vine I have discovered many dates, but would be grateful if presidents could check the dates, add them where missing and tell me if I've missed your community out. Please drop me a line on annette@goulden.co.uk

Thank you so much.

Central Region

Derby	
Nottingham	2012
Oxford St Therese	1995
Oxford St Joseph	1995
Oxford St Elijah	2012

East Region

Walsingham

London Region

Ealing	
Gerrards Cross	
Kensington Hermann Cohen	
Kensington St Teresa	
Notting Hill	June 2016
South London	Sept 2010

North East Region

Darlington	Oct 2003
Doncaster	1986 (?2008)
Leeds	

North West Region

Preston Our Lady of the Well	
Preston Spirit of Carmel	2003 15/6/03
Wirral Birkenhead	
Wirral Rock Ferry	

South West Region

Bristol	Dec 2016
Torquay	
Wincanton	Dec 1994

West Midlands Region

Hereford	Oct 2002
Worcester	

INSPIRATIONS

• Inspiration for lockdown

Christine Harvey writes:

If you have a little space, I came across this thought from St Therese quite near the start of the lockdown:

Jesus does not ask for great deeds, only self-surrender and gratitude.

It has stayed with me especially when I have been unable to help others as I would have done in normal circumstances.

• Poem

Thank you to Jane Snelling for sending us the following.

You ARE there, hiding,
Hiding in the shades of night,
Your face disguised in the distorted changes of this life.

Yet your beauty is wrapped round
What disguises, ground down.
Your breath's sweetness
Stills and quietens the air
Your love hidden but to be found.

The perfume of your sweetness
Fills the air of pain
Neglect and decay
To bring us all to life again.

I trust and place my hand
Onto what cannot yet be found
Upon this scarred and sacred ground.

• Formation template

Patrick Dillon of the Little Way Community, Bristol has kindly let me know that he would be delighted to pass on copies of their 14-page Formation planning document. Very comprehensive, it has suggestions for such things as, study guidance and evaluation over the full formation period. Please could any group interested in obtaining this email Patrick at:

beckettdillon@btinternet.com

Paul Reddy OCDS, Our Lady of Mount Carmel and St Teresa, Kensington

Paul Reddy joined the Secular Carmelites in Kensington in 1980 and was a stalwart there until his death on 23 February 2020, aged 85. He had been diagnosed with an untreatable cancer only three weeks earlier and died peacefully with his sister and nephews around him. His funeral on 19 March was almost the last before the lockdown, with his immediate family and a couple of Seculars braving the coronavirus to say farewell.

Paul was a man who lived in the presence of God. Living alone, he made prayer his daily business and had an unequalled knowledge of the London Catholic churches. Besides the Carmelites, he was a friend of the nuns at Tyburn Convent, where he liked to pray.

The counterpart to his strong faith – in part a result of it – was his ever-present cheerfulness. He had a lively sense of humour and a realistic view of the world, not taking it or himself too seriously. Everyone who knew him appreciated that and liked having him as part of the group.

Paul was also well read. We'd sometimes be discussing a religious topic and he'd bring in a reference to some other writer or point of view that often really illuminated it. His favourite author was Thomas Aquinas: I'm not sure how much of the *Summa Theologiae* he'd read, but he would come up with apposite quotations. I sometimes wondered what drew him to a writer who has a dry, academic reputation – and I think, partly it was because he was authoritative, and partly because he was attracted to St Thomas's realism, always relating everything to its place in God's plan. So here's a quotation from Thomas Aquinas that he would have appreciated:

'Faith is the foretaste of that knowledge which hereafter will make us happy.'

Mark Courtney

Richard Baldock OCDS, Immaculate Heart of Mary, Worcester

We are sorry to advise that Richard Baldock, our oldest member, died on 19 February. He would have been 95 in May. Richard joined the Birmingham group over 45 years ago. They met at Harborne Hall and then moved to Northfields, but the group was later disbanded. Richard was living in Worcester and applied to join the Hereford Group. He cycled to Malvern where he then had a lift to Much Birch Poor Clares Convent for the meetings. When the Group grew too large and had to split, he was one of the original members of the Worcester group.

Richard was an enthusiastic cyclist all his life, riding tandem with his wife and then after Doreen's death on his own up to the age of 90 ending up on an electric bike, a three-wheeler. He finally had to use an electric buggy to get around. Apart from cycling he enjoyed tennis into his eighties but confessed that in his later years he just used to stand still while someone batted the ball to him. He also bought a shed to house a table-tennis table and was a keen chess player.

As far as we know he never missed daily Mass, saying the Rosary at the end of Mass, and never missed his Carmelite meetings. He had a very enquiring mind and frequently asked questions which were difficult to answer. In his early life he tried his vocation with the Jesuits, worked for the Forestry Commission, joined (with his reluctant wife) a commune but was asked to leave because he wanted to change things all the time, then became curator of the Commandery Museum in Worcester and also ran a B&B. His final days ended in a nursing home after a fall which damaged his spine. He complained bitterly that he was unable to walk and wanted to go home and put a lift in his house but eventually he died peacefully. His funeral took place in St George's Worcester on 9 March. May he rest in peace.

NEWS FROM OUR CARMELITE SISTERS

- An excerpt from 'Hermits in Community' by Sister Thérèse Wilkinson
OCD of Thicket Priory

'We're all like you now;' observed my self-isolating mother, 'enclosed.' She isn't the first person to make the connection between my life as an enclosed Carmelite nun and the present lockdown. Some have asked for tips: 'How do you do it?' 'What advice can you give?' The more I think about it, the less comfortable I feel with the comparison. Carmelite monasteries are generally large buildings with spacious gardens. We have the luxury of space and particularly of personal space. It is a far cry from a family living in quarantine in a high rise flat.

Yet the Carmelite tradition does seem to have something worthwhile to say during this crisis. As Carmelite nuns we observe enclosure, which essentially means we may only leave the grounds of the monastery for medical reasons or other real necessities. We live in a limited space with the same group of people all of the time – a situation many families now find themselves in by necessity. Our contact with family, friends and other visitors is limited and they may only enter a certain part of the monastery reserved for visitors, not the area where we live and work.

Carmelites are often described as 'hermits in community.' Our foundress St Teresa of Avila structured our days so that they are balanced between solitude and community,

prayer and work, recreation and rest. On paper our timetable can look monotonous, as though every day must be the same. In reality, our daily routine provides a necessary balance, essential for our well-being. It ensures that we eat regularly, get enough rest and don't become consumed by a work ethic – or even a prayer ethic! For people staying at home these days, such a structure could be vital, especially if this lockdown extends into months.

As our Rule puts it, quoting Isaiah 30:15, 'Your strength shall lie in silence and hope.'

Sister Thérèse is a Carmelite nun at Thicket Priory near York. She is 42, originally from Warrington, and has been a cloistered nun for 18 years. You can follow her priory on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

- **A short excerpt from 'Learning to Live with Lockdown' by Sister Jo of Ware Carmel**

Lockdown and enclosure encourage all of us to find new ways of being in contact, of being meaningfully present to the other. For many, this has involved harnessing the vast potential of the internet and digital forms of communication. All of us have, in recent weeks, become more conversant with (although not necessarily more proficient at) using platforms such as Zoom, Skype, FaceTime, WhatsApp and the like, and discovering that remote contact is better than no contact at all.

For the monastic novice, frequent access to such modes of communication is not always encouraged (although contact with friends and family is much less restricted than in former times) and instead prayer opens up as a great and untapped means to communion. Praying for the sick and troubled, accompanying in prayer those who are approaching death, rejoicing in Christ's joy with those who celebrate – all these become powerful means of being present with and to those who are physically separate from us.

For Sr Jo's full paper, go to the end of this edition of The Vine.

- **Response to the Corona Virus**

Our three Priors at Kensington, Gerrards Cross and Boars Hill are offering daily live-streamed masses. At Boars Hill, there is also a daily evening rosary and Night Prayer at 8 pm. In addition, the friars at Boars Hill are offering booked telephone counselling and spiritual direction (see CACS report on page 20) while all the friars are available for help when needed.

- **Provincial Chapter 2020**

Our Provincial Superior, Fr Michael McGoldrick OCD writes:

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We have been given permission to hold our Provincial Chapter, postponed from May, by video link because of the Covid 19 restrictions. The Chapter will take place from July 27-31. Fr John Grennan will take up office as Provincial on July 28.

Please remember the Chapter in your prayers.

God bless

Michael

- **Regional website**

Fr Yamai at Boars Hill is working on a new regional website for the Carmelite Order in England and Wales. He would like to include text, information and pictures from the Seculars and the nuns as well as the friars and Priors. Thank you to all of those who have already contributed pictures, more would be very welcome. Please see **www.carmelite.uk.net**

Meanwhile, the present website for the Carmelite Priory, managed by Anna Faure, is still up and running: **www.carmeliteprioryoxford.com**

- **Live-streamed talks by Fr Matt Blake**

During the period of coronavirus, Fr Matt has been using the live-streaming facilities at St Joseph's Church, Gerrard's Cross, to give some outstanding talks on Carmelite prayer. Audio recordings – of about 45 minutes each – are now available, which can be downloaded using the links below.

Two Talks in the CACS Spiritual Enrichment Series

The Secret of Spiritual Growth

Part 1:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/177oBTwZyZbzGzDI33daEKe3ko2RwbCHh/view?usp=sharing>

Part 2:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1C5T1o-JLpJrPEWxtJL66-uyDiCLEhsUA/view?usp=sharing>

Transformed by the Beloved

Part 1:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/10EhR5MBExXnlxLw02rJalr2d7bY1Hltj/view?usp=sharing>

Part 2:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1RDH-uZuX5C5f6841CKxZK5o7RIq2k1YF/view?usp=sharing>

The First Four Weekly Talks in an Eight-Part Series on Prayer, based on Chapters 11-22 of St Teresa's "Life". (Live-streamed each Monday at 10.00 am and 8.00pm)

Week 1:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1FkMWc5ysmYw9dIPlixP55Qqaurp3BulR/view?usp=sharing>

Week 2:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1m5gE-mjK-hDwHyZ0oplrkzC4H7VSQbN0/view?usp=sharing>

Week 3

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/k53c437a5sl9qqp/Fr%20Matt%201%20June%2020.m4a?dl=0>
or https://drive.google.com/file/d/18CpZD1_8fathqMxXo0Oyh0exgzlnx4Bm/view?usp=sharing

Week 4

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1myCUhEquJqpl4m1zr0vH-gFoml56xa1-/view?usp=sharing>

The links for subsequent weeks will be cascaded to Groups via Regional Representatives.

Those who do not have devices to download an audio recording may request a CD of a talk. Phone or text Annette Goulden on: 01635 201960 or mob: 07831 160424.

A message from Fr Alex:

'ALL our courses are starting on the dates stated on the website regardless of whether the Priory is open or not. If government regulations necessitate that the priory will not be able to host our residential courses then those courses will run online until they are safe to be run in situ. The quality of delivery will not be affected.'

- **RETREATS AND SPIRITUAL ACCOMPANIMENT**

Breathing Space

During this pandemic when so many people are very worried and fearful and needing support, we're happy to offer this service of spiritual accompaniment and compassionate listening freely. People are welcome to make a donation if they wish.

Cherith Brook: On-line retreat in July 2020

Individually Guided Retreats from 1st July 2020. Option of 3, 5 or seven day retreats.

Graced Encounters

These talks will be livestreamed and we hope that presenters will be able to deliver their talk from wherever they are provided they have an internet link and perhaps Zoom.

The series will feature a number of Carmelite saints - Teresa of Avila, Teresa Margaret Redi, Therese of Lisieux, Teresa of the Andes and Teresa Benedicta (Edith Stein). The first part will be about their experience of Jesus (about 40 mins). The second part will be their relationship with a significant other(s) in their life (about 40 mins). So, the series is about how our friendship with Christ can impact on and be supported by our other encounters in life. Indirectly then, the series will hope to highlight and promote the value of spiritual friendships/companionship.

The scheduled dates and already booked presenters are as follows:

September 20th: St Teresa of Avila (1515-1582) - Matt Blake

October 4th: St Teresa Margaret Redi (1747-1770)

October 18th: St Therese of Lisieux (1873-1897) - Vincent O'Hara

November 1st: St Teresa of the Andes (1900-1920) - Alexander Ezechukwu

November 15th: St Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (1891-1942) - Christof Betschart

COURSES

Spirituality Enrichment Lecture Series (SELS)

Live-streamed Saturday lectures (available for two weeks after live-stream)

School of Prayer Sept 2020 – May 2021

For those who realise the importance of prayer in their lives and are seeking a deeper relationship with God and support and encouragement in their search. It is not intended as an academic programme; the course will be mainly experiential.

Participants will be invited to take an active part in spiritual conversation, workshops and small group sharing. It will also include essential reading, intended as a framework and support for the ongoing process of prayer, reflection and growth.

Prayer Guides Course Sept 2020 – May 2021

For those who desire to deepen their prayer experience and feel called to accompany others who turn to them for support on their spiritual journey. As part of the course, experiential sessions in which aspects of Carmelite prayer will be explored, as well as biblical ways of prayer, reflections on the experience of prayer, listening skills and relationship dynamics, basic skills for leading prayer sessions, models of prayer, difficulties in prayer and aids to prayer.

Living Prayer Course Sept 2020 – May 2021

This course aims to enable one to practise contemplative living according to one's own lifestyle. The course meets one weekend (Friday – Sunday) a month from September 2020 to May 2021 and is presented by the Living Prayer Course Team of the Centre for Applied Carmelite Spirituality (CACS) and invited speakers.

Formation is offered in contemplative prayer, lifestyle and activity through:

- Deepening one's experience of Silent Prayer, Lectio Divina, Contemplative Liturgy, Psalmody, Prayer Journaling, the 'Gratitude Prayer' and Spiritual Reading.
- Nurturing the contemplative dimension of one's lifestyle by exercising discernment, simplicity, forgiveness, integrity and commitment.

Spiritual Direction Training Programme (Carmelite Tradition) 2021-2023

The Programme is centred on journeying with others who seek to deepen and grow in their personal relationship with God. There are no set rules for this, and no single pathway, but a willingness to deepen one's contemplative awareness and to respond to the leading of the Holy Spirit who is ever calling us and working towards the greater fulfilment and wholeness of each person.

From Communicationis 355, May 2020

Countless are the reports of material help given by our communities of friars and nuns to people in need. So, in Paraguay, our religious have turned to helping the poor through 'popular pots', which allow the poor to enjoy at least a daily amount of nourishment.

We pray for the friars and nuns who have been infected and we appreciate the witness of Christian charity and service to the community offered by our brothers and sisters in various ways as they are able.

India

As of now I have not heard of any casualties among our friars or sisters in India due to Corona. However, our friars are actively taking initiatives to feed the hungry which is the urgent need of the situation. Wherever we are present we take initiatives to distribute kits containing food; provisions, sanitizers, masks, etc. That's all we can do. Our nuns all over India are praying day and night unceasingly for the divine intervention.

P. Johannes Gorantla, Definitor for South Asia

WAITING FOR THE HOLY SPIRIT WITH MARY THE MOTHER OF JESUS

Sister Stephanie OCD of Quidenham Carmel has kindly given permission for us to reproduce the talk she prepared for the (now postponed) East Anglia Regional Day in April.

There appeared to them parted tongues as it were of fire, and it sat upon every one of them; and they were filled with the Holy Spirit.



The great image which prefigures this is the burning bush that Moses sees, on fire yet not consumed. When the true God comes close, He makes creation more luminous, more radiant and more beautiful, but does not destroy. When the true God comes, He makes the world radiant. Where the burning bush comes to its fullest expression is the Incarnation: God becomes one of us without ceasing to be God and without undermining the integrity of the creature He becomes, and within whom He has His being.

The early Church Fathers contemplated this with wonder and Gregory of Nyssa wrote:

It is upon us who continue in this quiet and peaceful course of life that the truth will shine, illuminating the eyes of our soul with its own rays. This truth, which was manifested by the ineffable and mysterious illumination which came to Moses is God. And if the flame by which the soul of the prophet was kindled from a thorny bush, even this fact will not be useless for our inquiry. For it truth is God and truth is Light ... such guidance of virtue leads us to know that light which has reached down to human nature. Lest one think that the radiance did not come from a material substance, this light did not shine from some luminary among the stars, but came from an earthly bush and surpassed the heavenly luminaries in brilliance.

From this we learn also the mystery of the Virgin: the light of divinity which through birth shone from her into human life did not consume the burning bush.

This Light of Divinity, the Holy Spirit, without which there would be no revelation, no holiness, no Church, found hearts ready to receive it, and none so ready as the heart of Mary. Jesus' indwelling of Mary did not compromise her humanity, but brought it to fullest expression. So her role in preparing the disciples for the coming of the Spirit was very important indeed, for in her the disciples could see that what they were waiting and praying for, to be clothed with the Holy Spirit, had already happened in Mary. The promise of the Father had already clothed her with power, the power that Jesus had: patient endurance, loving forgiveness; unshakeable peace and joy – all fruits of the Spirit's presence. Her one desire, like that of her Son, was to receive from the Father with grateful acceptance whatever He gave her; and once received to give back to the Father her whole self in order to glorify Him.

Today it may seem as if we are sitting, waiting for the promise of the Father, the Holy Spirit, who will explain all things to us. Like the disciples once again in the upper room we wait to receive the loving intimacy Jesus offers and respond with the firm commitment to enthrone Him as the King of our hearts. Our life, our activities, our relationships, our thinking and speaking, all must then be directed to union with Him so that then what we say and do will draw men and women to run to their Saviour. Scripture gives us Mary as the model of the true disciple, showing us her life totally, absolutely dedicated to Jesus her Son.

*You make me feel that it's not impossible
To follow in your footsteps, O Queen of the elect.
You made visible the narrow road to Heaven
While always practicing the humblest virtues.*

No one can know what was in Our Lady's mind and heart as she waited and prayed with the disciples for the 'promise of the Father'. What we do know is that this ageing woman, as a young virgin, consented with her whole being to what God asked of her

something, the height and depth of which she could not understand and, as mother of her first born son, amazed at what the shepherds were saying of Him, 'kept all these things, pondering them in her heart.'

Later in Bethlehem, O Joseph and Mary !

I see you rejected by all the villagers.

No one wants to take in poor foreigners.

There's room for the great ones ...

There's room for the great ones, and it's in a stable ...

How I love you listening to the shepherds and wisemen

And keeping it all in your heart with care! ...

She is the same woman who was hurt and bewildered by the independent, seemingly wilful decision of her 12-year old son to remain behind in Jerusalem while the family left for home. Her anguished cry: 'My son, how *could* you?' was met with surprise and disappointment: 'Why did you look for me? did you not realise that this was where I must be, in my Father's house?' What could a faithful mother do when faced with such sheer mystery but keep all these things in her heart?

But in Jerusalem a bitter sadness

Comes to flood your heart like a vast ocean.

For three days, Jesus hides from your tenderness.

That is indeed exile in all its harshness !...

At last you find him and you are overcome with joy,

You say to the fair Child captivating the doctors :

'O my Son, why have you done this?

Your father and I have been searching for you in tears.'

And the Child God replies (O what a deep mystery !)

To his dearest Mother holding out her arms to him :

'Why were you searching for me ?

I must be about My Father's business. Didn't you know ?'

During the startling, even frightening, wonderful ministry of her son, his mother was not spared the life-or-death question: 'Who do you say I am?' and as Simeon had prophesied, the painful sword of discernment pierced her inmost soul, cutting through her cherished Jewish heritage. Along with all who came into contact with Jesus, she must cross the frontiers to unknown vistas of faith. And with bitter pain and apprehension she witnessed the fearsome hostility gathering around her beloved child and with unimaginable grief saw him humiliated and crucified.

*I love you mingling with the other women
Walking toward the holy temple.
I love you presenting the Savior of our souls
To the blessed Old Man who pressed Him to his heart.
At first I smile as I listen to his canticle,
But soon his tone makes me shed tears.
Plunging a prophetic glance into the future,
Simeon presents you with a sword of sorrows.*

In these early days of Eastertide we are aware that Calvary is not just a remote and distant event of the past. It is not too difficult to recall our journey with Mary from the Praetorium to Golgotha, and in faith too, we stood beside her beneath the Cross, sharing in her helplessness. St Teresa Benedicta of the Cross writes of this part of our Carmelite vocation:

But those whom you have chosen as companions here, surrounding you one day at the eternal throne, we now must stand, with you, beneath the Cross and purchase, with our heart's bitter pains, this spark of heaven for those priceless souls whom God's own Son bequeaths to us, His heirs.

To embrace this mystery, as Mary did, requires the deepest faith of all. The faith of Jesus. 'Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that suckled you!' was a woman's spontaneous exclamation at the splendour of the human Jesus. Jesus did not deny his mother's blessedness in this, but declared her more blessed for *really* hearing the word of God and obeying it.

The evangelist John completes the scriptural picture of Jesus' mother. He is 'the disciple whom Jesus loved'. 'This is the disciple who is bearing witness to these things, and who has written these things; and we know that his testimony is true.' We are told that after Pentecost Mary lived with him in his home. Why had Jesus, on the cross, given her his beloved disciple to her as son and bidden the disciple take her as mother, if not that, together they should give knowledge of the one true God and Jesus Christ His only Son, to the new-born Church and the Church for all time? Mary is our mother and as we may reasonably surmise she enlightened and deepened the faith of the Beloved Disciple, we may trust her to do the same for us. She will show us what it means to abide in Jesus, to live in Him, to be so one with Him that our prayer to the Father is the prayer of Jesus Himself, and the fire of love Jesus enkindled on earth, will through His Spirit, burn within us.

As Carmelites we are aware of our particular vocation of prayer and interior solitude; that free and conscious surrender of our being to Our Lord. To gain the courage and fidelity to do this, like Mary, we ponder the words God speaks to us. As I write this 'talk' I am aware that you are asked to renounce even the communal Eucharist. How

much more than should we, the whole Carmelite family, feel responsible for the prayer of the Divine Office which continues to hold us in communion with one another. Pondering these sacred texts, we realise, *make real*, that none of our prayers and liturgies are to be lived without feeling ourselves united to the whole Body of Christ that is the Church, the community of the Baptised reaching out to embrace the whole of humanity, indeed all of creation.

The Marian antiphon for Eastertide is the Regina Coeli. Recited as we enter the night, it is a light breaking in on any darkness that shrouds the earth and the hearts of us all. This is a joyous antiphon and it is meant to be so; Christ Jesus, Son of God, Son of Mary, risen from the dead the first fruits of all those called into God's embrace. Keeping step with Mary as we recite the Regina Coeli, we can be sure that we will be taken into event of Pentecost when a mighty wind surged through the house and what seemed like tongues of fire settled on the heads of each person present. It was a manifestation of the birth of the Church, and for the mother of Jesus, entry into the fullness of her divine motherhood.

Here is a woman who during her life resolutely trod the Way of Perfection, from the free surrender of her will to be conformed with God's, fidelity to that gift given, to its fruition in eternity

We have our part to play like Mary, in His mysterious plan of redemption as it unfolds until the end of time. In the poetry of St Symeon the Theologian (d.1022):

*I share with trembling joy in the divine fire
I who am only hay,
And, oh, such a strange miracle ...
Without being consumed I continue to burn
In a beautiful flaming light
As did once the burning bush*

The Holy Spirit of God was able to accomplish in Mary all He desired. There is much in us that needs to be purified and transformed if we are to be all that God longs for us to be and truly this is our deepest desire too. So with St Therese we may pray with gratitude:

*O Immaculate Virgin, most tender of Mothers...
you rejoice that He makes us understand
How our souls become his family here below.
Yes, you rejoice that He gives us his life,
The infinite treasures of his divinity! ...*

APPENDIX

LEARNING TO LIVE IN LOCKDOWN, BY SISTER JO, WARE CARMEL

In recent weeks, various commentators have drawn parallels between the circumstances of lockdown and the enclosed life adopted by religious orders such as the Carmelites, Cistercians and Benedictines. While there may be some similarities in the experience, it seems important at the outset to acknowledge some fundamental differences too. After all, the young nun or monk entering the monastery does so freely, and for very positive reasons, feeling called by God to explore this radical new lifestyle. They enter a house which is precisely designed to accommodate and foster such a sequestered way of living, with designated spaces for privacy and often extensive grounds for manual work and exercise. Moreover, the newly-arrived individual enters a community well used to living the enclosed life; they are accepted into an established situation, where the more experienced residents can provide stability and assistance while the novice finds their feet. These differences alone (and there are many others) make the experience of entering enclosed religious life vastly different from the imposed circumstances with which families have been grappling over the past weeks – adjusting to being together for extended periods, often in cramped conditions, while at the same time grappling with the demands of childcare, home-schooling and remote working. Perhaps the most significant similarity, then, between lockdown and enclosed religious life may be the difficulty involved in adapting to it. No novice sails into the monastery immediately attuned to the demands of enclosure; it is a faltering process in which the young religious must slowly adapt to the very personal challenges with which their new way of life will confront them. It is this stumbling process of acclimatisation and adjustment that the new religious currently shares with our wider society, which suddenly and unexpectedly has had to feel its way into a new mode of being. It is therefore in a spirit of shared adversity that the following observations are offered, in the hope that a mutual experience can sometimes be lightened of some of its load.

One of the first puzzles which confronts the new religious is what to do with themselves, how to fill the long expanses of time which were formerly crammed with diverse activities and occupations; work, leisure activities, visiting friends and family – all of which involved a breathless rushing about from one place to another. As the nun or monk adjusts to the discipline of stability – of being and remaining in one place all the time – there can be both a mental and physical restlessness, a chafing at the newly acquired restrictions. Here, the monastic tradition offers the wisdom of a structured timetable, or *horarium*, as it is known in monastery-speak. This has two advantages. First it tells the young religious (and their novice guardian!) what they should be doing at any point in the day. Time where one has to question, ‘what will I

do now?', is more likely to be wasted than time which has been earmarked for a specific activity. More importantly, however, the monastic timetable offers a variety of such activities; it's not just more and more of the same. Liturgical prayer (Mass and the Divine Office) are alternated with periods of manual work, study, communal recreation and solitary prayer. This diversity provides a rhythm to the day and avoids tedium, it helps prevent the religious from becoming obsessed with a single task, and encourages them to move, both physically and mentally, from one activity to another. Far from being a tyrannical taskmaster, the monastic *horarium* thus becomes a gentle friend which carries the religious through the day, accompanying and supporting them especially in the first months and years of acclimatisation until the new pace and rhythm of the monastery is interiorised and becomes a natural way of being.

A second challenge for the new nun or monk is living without peak experiences. Normal life often occurs in an ebb and flow-type fashion. We build up to a big event at work or in our home lives – a specific work assignment, wedding or birthday – and all eyes are on that until it's over, at which point there may be a pause or a holiday before some fresh focal point appears on the horizon. As the monastic *horarium* indicates, most days in the monastery are pretty much the same as any other. By and large, there aren't big events to prepare for and look forward to; pretty much there's no crucial project on which all energies have to be invested. Instead, the novice has to adjust to a gentler existence, and in this process there is a gradual stilling down which is designed to foster an environment, both interior and exterior, more suited to prayer and contemplation. It also creates a capacity in the religious to notice the little things in life, the tiny indicators of God's presence and goodness; the changing of the seasons, the appearance of the first snowdrop, a sunset or rainbow which can be delighted over, rather than dismissed as an inconsequential meteorological side-event. It also encourages the monastic community to delight in the little happenings of daily life. All sorts of occasions are marked in the tiniest of ways; the day of the novice entering the community, birthdays and profession anniversaries, the saints and seasons of the liturgical year, all acknowledged by the tiniest of gestures – maybe marmalade at breakfast when there usually isn't any, a special pudding, a simple note or small card left under the cell door, even a hug or grin from a companion. All these denote an attentiveness to the little things, and build celebration and joy into what could otherwise be a formless existence.

Of course, this attentiveness to the little things has a flipside too. One of the first things the new monastic learns is that the little things matter, and can be used both positively and negatively. A frown or scowl across the monastic refectory speaks as loudly as a smile or nod of thanks, and its negativity can be as enduring as the goodness spread by the tiny gestures of kindness and celebration we have already noted. Omissions speak volumes too; failing to hold a door open, to wait for the

other, to help someone struggling with an awkward load, all introduce a level of toxicity to the environment and darken the atmosphere of the monastery. There is thus a self-discipline to be acquired in avoiding the thoughtless gestures of irritation or annoyance which so easily leak out from us. As every family knows, rows and discord are more likely to emerge around the little things than the big. The need to live together day after day demands a care and vigilance in our relating to one another which may not be obvious in more mobile or fluctuating populations. On the other hand, the little things offer great opportunities for healing and peace-making too. When a verbal apology feels impossible, and further dialogue will only re-open old wounds, the tiniest of gestures or attitudes can be an olive branch, an opening to the road of peace, and an indication of the desire to mend fences. Once again, the power of a smile, a helping hand, a friendly word, makes its presence felt. In enclosure and lockdown maybe we all have to learn a new vocabulary of relating to one another, one which may often be silent and recognisable only to the one to whom it is directed.

Of course, peak experiences often centre around friends and family, and one of the greatest sorrows of the new religious can be the inability to participate in such events as we watch our acquaintances get on with life without us. Lockdown has brought real hardship to many in this area too. Hardly a person is untouched by the inability to mark a special event; parties have been cancelled, weddings postponed, significant achievements and milestones left uncelebrated. For many people this has extended to the sadness of being unable to attend or even hold funeral services – to say goodbye to loved ones in the way we would have wished. There is something deeply poignant about the burial of a much-loved family member which is attended by the smallest number of close contacts. There is a pain to this which needs to be acknowledged and experienced, which cannot be simply brushed aside or dismissed as inconsequential.

The same is true of the young religious who cannot just leave the monastery to attend every family gathering, no matter how significant or important it may be. Lockdown and enclosure thus encourage all of us to find new ways of being in contact, of being meaningfully present to the other. For many, this has involved harnessing the vast potential of the internet and digital forms of communication. All of us have, in recent weeks, become more conversant with (although not necessarily more proficient at) using platforms such as Zoom, Skype, FaceTime, WhatsApp and the like, and discovering that remote contact is better than no contact at all. For the monastic novice, frequent access to such modes of communication is not always encouraged (although contact with friends and family is much less restricted than in former times), and instead prayer opens up as a great and untapped means to communion. Praying for the sick and troubled, accompanying in prayer those who are

approaching death, rejoicing in Christ's joy with those who celebrate – all these become powerful means of being present with and to those who are physically separate from us. Often these will be people who were known to the novice in their previous life; friends, family, colleagues and so on. But as the young religious adjusts to this means of communion they find their hearts crowded with those whose situation now claims their compassion. Quite simply, the horizons of concern and affection broaden with surprising rapidity, and we find our hearts embracing not only those who were already near and dear to us, but the distant and the unknown too. The family of humankind becomes a living reality, as our eyes and hearts are opened to the needs of those who would previously have passed unnoticed – those in countries, circumstances and plights quite new to us. This, of course, is the great paradox of solitude. Rather than creating isolation, solitude – lived rightly – builds communion and solidarity with remarkable efficiency. This was the wisdom of the first monks of the early Christian church, who went out to the desert not to escape humanity but to embrace it. And this has been one of the discoveries of lockdown too: across the country, neighbourhoods of unknown and even faceless individuals have become fledgling communities of care and mutual concern. People have reached out to one another in friendship and a new generosity of spirit which few would wish to lose when normal life returns. Just as this new communion and solidarity is the greatest lesson – even the *raison d'être* of monastic life – so maybe it is the gift which lockdown, for all its difficulties and privations, offers each of us. It is a precious gift to be cherished and nurtured, and which each of us must find a way of carrying into the 'new normal' – whatever that turns out to be.

Cover photo: *The lime avenue, West Raynham, Norfolk in May (In heaven it always the second week in May)*