

Alleluia! Alleluia! He is risen!

International Formation House, Bataan, Philippines



Many people all over the world are suffering because of COVID-19 but, on the other hand, this is a time to reflect on what is the most important thing in our life. This important thing may be our inter-connection, inter-relatedness, as Sister Kristin pointed out in her Easter letter.

At this very special and historic moment, we share with you how we have been and how we have lived during Holy Week and Easter. We cannot leave our formation house except to buy our groceries or medicine. We try to connect with other people as little as possible, and no priests can come here, so we have had a communion service everyday since the lockdown one month ago. Since our formation house is located in a mountainous area, the internet is not reliable. This is why we no longer try watching Mass on TV or by internet.

However, Sister Kathleen, who is visiting the international house in Bataan now, led our liturgy during the Easter Triduum, and we could participate in the sacred ceremonies. These experiences gave us abundant and beautiful memories. At first, on Palm Sunday, we processed along the road in our garden holding palm leaves and singing “Hosanna” in each language on the way to the chapel. On Holy Thursday, we had a Haggadah, a Jewish Passover service, before the liturgy. Sister Marie Rose, a novice who was in charge of the kitchen at that time, baked Haggadah bread for this paschal supper, and we shared the blessing wine made from the fruit in our garden and then listened at table to the history of salvation from the Old Testament.

We gathered together in the conference hall, Vincent Hall, for the Holy Thursday liturgy. For this night, the place really looked like the upper room where Jesus had had the last supper with his disciples. In one corner, two chairs were prepared for washing feet. Any sister who wanted to sit there, her feet were washed by another sister, and she had a chance to reconcile with God and the sisters through this rite.

On Good Friday, we had a day of recollection. In the afternoon the novices performed the Way of the Cross and then we moved to the chapel to venerate the cross.

Even though we were the only participants, the novices discussed how to celebrate the Easter feast joyfully and prepared the programs. On the Easter vigil, we started from the Genesis and the Exodus via the fountains of the Lord, finally arrived in front of the empty tomb listening to the salvific history. Sister Kathleen organized well the reading places in our garden according to the contents of each reading so we could experience the living liturgy. Before the small bridge, we listened the reading of Exodus; in front of the fountain around Mary's statue, we listened to Isaiah. At last, we could sing "Gloria" together with gladness of Easter.

Even though we could not attend the Easter Mass with our brothers and sisters in Christ, I believe God will give all of us the true meaning of resurrection through this situation, and he will fulfill our longing and hope that this pandemic will stop soon and we can contact each other again.

We still cannot do marketing easily. However, we daughters of St. Julie began to find the solutions we can manage: baking bread, cooking vegetables from our garden, and planting new fruits and vegetables for the future. COVID-19 imposes physical disconnection because of the lockdown but also gives us the chance to cooperate with each other more and to practice creative fidelity. We hope that we all remember each other in our daily life and prayer, as we go forward into the world bringing our inner gladness, bravery, hope, and support for each other.