

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This morning, I read an article in the *La Crosse Tribune* (May 2, 2020, p. C3) entitled, "Quarantine advice from the cloister" (Jenny Berg, St. Cloud Times). The article was about the sisters at St. Clare's Monastery in Sauk Rapids, Minnesota. The writer had interviewed five of the sisters to seek out their advice about staying at home during this time of the Coronavirus Pandemic. Since the sisters live in a monastery and leave "only for emergencies or medical appointments," they are well acquainted with staying at home. Many have lived there for years, citing 39, 27, 22, and 17 years for 4 of the 16 nuns. Their daily routine includes: praying 7 times per day, attending mass, a breakfast of bread and water, milk or coffee; a main meal mid-day, chores, and recreation.

The sisters' recommendations, based on experience and observation, follow that of mental health experts.

Local mental health professionals recommend establishing a routine and helping people, which releases dopamine and oxytocin in the brain. Other suggestions include taking the time to notice the good things and showing gratitude for them (emphasis added).

One might think that living as they do would be a lonely existence. Yet, the writer states, "Instead of feeling confined or isolated, the sisters say they find safety and security within the monastery." Sister Marie Elizabeth stated, "...[O]ut in the world you can be around a ton of people but still be very lonely," she continued. But that sense to me is not here. In the enclosure, we're never by ourselves. We're with Jesus all the time. He's always present everywhere. There's not that sense of loneliness."

As we contemplate our lives right now, let us be mindful that Jesus is the "gate" and the "Good Shepherd." Jesus provides those who believe in him and follow him with safety and security. Jesus' sheep do not need to feel lonely, for Jesus is present with us/them, even in this time of Safer-At-Home. Jesus is the Good Shepherd, and we are his sheep. May we too find safety and security in his presence with us.

Blessings and peace,

Pastor Cathy