



The Monastery of Notre Dame de L'Atlas *(Midelt, Morocco)*

Dear Brothers and Sisters, parents, friends and close friends PEACE BE WITH YOU!

When we wrote a letter to the Holy Father Francis in January 2021, we did not expect a response. Yet this is exactly what came forth on March 19th, the feast day of St. Joseph. Our Holy Father wrote: "I thank you from the depths of my heart for the letter you addressed to me, signed by each one of you. It expresses with faith and depth the sense of your presence on Muslim land, following the path of your martyr brothers of Tibhirine. As I keep each one of you in my prayers, it is my hope that your cistercian life, engraved with silence, work and oraison, may continue to give witness to the presence of Christ resurrected, for all men and women in your vicinity and whom you love, thus endeavouring towards the rising of a more humane and fraternal world. The generous offering of your selves and your lives are essential to the advancement of The Kingdom of God". In his letter, the Holy Father entrusts to our prayers "the great challenges that our world and The Church need to face" and gives us his "affectionate Apostolic Blessing". Grazie papa Francesco!



Such a surprise could not have arisen without the intervention of the most reverent Bishop Giovanni D'Ercole, who, following a first three months stay at our Monastery left us on February 1st 2021 carrying in his suitcase a letter intended for our Holy Father. Who would at that time even imagine he would be back by mid-September? In fact, Bishop Giovanni generously offered the community his services to supersede, primarily for the Eucharistic celebrations, our father prior, gone to France on October 2nd for extended health care needs. Fr. Jean-Pierre shall not yet be with us for Christmas, which he will celebrate at the Abbey Notre Dame d'Aiguebelle.

It was from our Mother house that Dom Georges arrived to carry out the regular visitation, from the 18th to the 28th of July. Our Father immediately gave us all his time and care during his 10 day visitation and left us with a "courageous and encouraging" visitation card, as per the joyful expression from P. Jean-Pierre the elder.

You have guessed: 2021 will remain engraved in our minds and in the history of Notre-Dame de l'Atlas, as being the year when Father Jean-Pierre Schumacher's own Paschal mystery happened, somewhat unexpectedly, on the 21st of November. The light of his small lamp quenched, as the Christian community in Midelt was celebrating the Mass of Christ the King in the monastery church and when our nursing brother was in his presence reciting the rosary, the Marian devotion which was most particularly dear to him. We would have so many things to share with respect to his funeral celebration, but this letter could not contain them all! A picture is worth a thousand words: here are some of them. No doubt the time will come when we can share all the testimonies of friendship and brotherly tenderness we experienced on this occasion.





Until then, we would like to mention herewith the kind gesture given by our Muslim friend Youssef from Timnay. At the end of January, he presented us with a small video he made as a tribute to our 7 martyr brothers of Tibhirine and to mark Father Jean-Pierre's 25 year presence in Morocco (arrived first in Fez in April 1996). Shukran, Youssef! This greetings letter is much too limited to accommodate the names of all our donors for the year 2021, who have been exceptionally numerous and generous. May the Lord bless and bestow

His grace upon them in Heaven, in Christ Jesus.

If in 2020, our guest house was closed due to the pandemic, this year our doors were wide open for Easter celebrations and we welcomed around 30 guests, all living in Morocco, of which six French young couples and a dozen children. What a joy for each one of us! All along the next months, residents arrived from Africa, Europe and even South America.



A wave of several groups of visitors came to either discover the memorials, enjoy a fraternal meal with the community, but also for short periods of stay in our guest house: protestant and catholic students from the Ecumenical Institute Al-Mowafaqa from the city of Rabat, along with its Director the Pastor Jean Koulagna; some parishioners from Fez, Errachidia and from the Cathedral in Rabat; an

Islam-Christian group of young Christian university students from Ifrane together with our friend Pastor Karen Smith. Ms Dan, the Consul of France in Fez and the Vice Consul of France in Rabat, his spouse and their two children also came to meet us and discover the monastery.

In June, the Friars Minor of the Custody of the Holy Land in Morocco was at our monastery Notre Dame de l'Atlas for their annual retreat, then in August we welcomed the sisters from the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary and the Little Sisters of Jesus residing in Morocco. The monastery also welcomed twice the "Charles de Foucault" group, who are organising the activities expected to take place in our Church for his canonization, on May 15th, 2022. And on 15th May 2021, two Moroccan friends from the Sufi Tariqa Alawiyya (of which several members once participated to the Ribat-es-Salam meetings at Tibhirine). Soufiane and Jamal offered to give their participation to the International Day of Living Together in Peace, by the filming of dialogues with some brothers and the recording of the Office of Terce. But for us, the interfaith dialogue is particularly incarnated in day to day encounters and this year we were happy to resume our community trips to family friends, on major Muslim feasts or "sadaqa".



We were also actively engaged in meetings for our Church, either in Rabat, Fez or Meknes, either at the Monastery. In the meantime, Br. Nuno continues his training programme at the Institut Al-Mowafaqa and at the ICP, almost all sessions on site, through Zoom or on learning platforms.

And finally, we give thanks to our Lord for the visit among us of a Spanish observer, Moisés, for a period of discovery of the monastic life at Notre Dame de l'Atlas. We zealously pray God the Holy Father to "send us the brothers of whom we feel the real need to move further", according to the expression of our dear Fr. Jean-Pierre

Schumacher, selected for our daily prayer for vocations. He is indeed in the right place now, besides our martyr brothers of Tibhirine to intercede in favour of us all!

*We wish you a Happy Christmas 2021 and grace upon grace for the year 2022.
These are the wishes of your Brothers of the Monastery of Notre Dame de l'Atlas.*

Translation : Corinne R. O'Connor