

In Haute-Garonne, the Christian life is gradually taking back its rights.

By Xavier Le Normand, special envoy to Toulouse and Saint-Gaudens, on 1/6/2020 at 09:38 a.m.

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A week after the authorization of public worship, Catholics find their way back to their parish churches. In Haute-Garonne, Christian life seems to be slowly but truly returning to its normal course, beyond the celebration of the Eucharist alone.



"It's about time!" Maria Lourdes, a resident of the Minimes district of Toulouse, does not hide her distress at the delay before the resumption of worship services. But this Sunday, May 31, her parish reopened its doors and she can finally participate in Mass and take communion sacramentally. And on this Pentecost Sunday, the church of Saint-François-de-Paule des Minimes welcomes the local bishop, Mgr Robert Le Gall, who came to give the sacrament of Confirmation to six young adults, four women and two men. The bishop is also there to continue his pastoral visit in the area, interrupted by a two and a half month parenthesis, the time of confinement.

DECONFINED MASSES. For Pentecost, Protestant parishes cautiously reopen their doors

Sitting a few steps away from Maria Lourdes, within the imposed safety distance, Clémence gently rocks a stroller from which six-week-old Simon silently watches the comings and goings in the church with his black eyes wide open. The young mother has come with her husband Arnaud to introduce her child to their parish community. "We are proud of this first step in the Christian life," enthused Clémence, assuring that her son will be baptized "as soon as possible". Married last year, the young couple is delighted to "be able to live an incarnate faith again".

Resume worship services "with caution."

"It's a great joy to see the world again," adds Melanie. With her husband Alain, she is one of those confirmed today. So that they can marry religiously, but not only that. "I want to finish the journey of initiation into the faith," Mélanie emphasizes while holding hands with her two young daughters.

The weekend when masses resumed to some extent...

The parish priest, Father Norbert Mwishabongo Mukwanga, is also pleased that Mass has resumed, and that the ceremony will be presided over by the bishop. "We no longer believed that there would be confirmations this year, and the bishop makes us happy to be here on the day of Pentecost! The Holy Spirit is mischievous!" Confirmations and communion, but also the presentation of two newborn babies - including little Simon - and the blessing of medals at the end of Mass, parish life seems to have fully resumed at Les Minimes.

However, if the church was full for Sunday masses before the confinement, only a few hundred faithful were present for the ceremony around their bishop. "It's not yet rush time, commented Bishop Le Gall after Mass, but that's just as well: it was vital to resume the ceremonies, but we have to go slowly and carefully."

In Rheims, the parishioners of Saint-André at the time of the homecoming

If the 74 year old bishop was able during the confinement to return with some pleasure to his former life as a Benedictine - he was abbot of Kergonan (Morbihan) from 1983 to

2001 - he has already returned to a more normal rhythm of life. Meeting with the seminarians, meeting with the exorcism service, presiding over elections in a Carmelite convent, other confirmations... his agenda for the next few days is full. Without forgetting the ordinations at the end of the month and the formalities for the purchase of a piece of land in order to build a new parish - a "priority" even if the finances are fragile.

A new time of community prayer

Halfway between Toulouse and Lourdes, the sub-prefecture of Saint-Gaudens seems to be asleep in the torpor of a late afternoon on a sunny Sunday. But behind the walls of its majestic Romanesque collegiate church, built between the 11th and 13th centuries, Christian life seems to have resumed there too. At the lectern, an energetic nun of the Sisters of St. Joseph asked the twenty or so faithful present to pray the intercession of St. Zymunt Gorazdowski and Blessed Justin Mary of the Holy Trinity. The former is the founder of his community, while the latter is at the origin of the vocationist fathers, to whom the parish of St. Gaudens has been entrusted.

Initiatives to live one's faith while awaiting the authorisation of religious gatherings

After her presentation, the nun returns to her seat while a priest prepares the monstrance for a time of adoration followed by Vespers. "It is a new proposal since the deconfinement and people come with joy," assures another nun of St. Joseph while refusing to have her name mentioned.

According to this nun, the parish rhythm has truly resumed, with more masses to respect the norms. However, the good practices of confinement have not disappeared: at the foot of the altar, a telephone is fixed on a tripod to broadcast live the time of adoration and the service. While Christians can now pray and celebrate together, those who still opt for prudence have not been forgotten.