

## Introduction to the International Encounter

Invitation to enter into this International Encounter by letting ourselves be guided by Psalm 35:

*"In you is the source of life,  
In your light we see light."*

Moment of **grace**: the choice of this encounter at the beginning of its preparation in November 2012.

The depth of unity that this phrase gives us expressed in **the unity of this week**. In fact, the program, at a first rapid analysis, can appear excessive:

- Community's spiritual journey in the Cistercian charism
- Two conferences to help us look deeper into spirituality and formation
- Statute on formation of Lay Cistercians. Finished for the French-speaking group, it still needs to be approved by the English- and Spanish-speaking groups, and, in fact, for us all.
- General Assembly of our Association, questions asked by the communities and the start of drafting an "internal rules".
- Assessment of finances and morale
- Election of a new International Committee

Everything is combined: the days are dense, it will be necessary to move from one place to another. We are like to feel crushed or squeezed, perhaps frightened.

But, the first sentence, *"In you is the source of life,"* clarifies the main theme: Our spiritual journey in the light of the Cistercian charism. What do we live near our monastic communities, what do we seek, who do we seek? **We are led to something greater than us.**

*"In you is the source of life"* An objective that goes beyond us; spiritual journey, them that we cannot come to the end of since it is true that is never finished, it opens us to infinity.

By the testimonies received, by the shared desire to tell our experiences to each other and thus to accept **listening** to each other, we have, even before arriving, applied the **spirituality of communion** of our previous encounters.

Fully centered on the *"source of life"* nothing more can frighten us.

Concretely realizing that this is what we desire, it is toward this that we tend, not toward our own desires, listening to each other, **we will help each other** better discover the underground river that carries us and gives us life.

To live this quest very close to the spring that Mary, the Immaculate, the Queen of Citeaux, caused to spout here a little more than 150 years ago, draws us yet more surely toward Her Son.

Starting from accounts received, a martyr text was edited and was sent to you: it will be the basis for work in language groups. Then we will work together to make synthesis that will be presented by the French-speaking delegate to the Chapter of Bernardines in August and then by the new International Committee to the OCSO General Chapter on September 22 in Assisi. All this will take us through Thursday.

The deep source of our life **enlightens us, illuminates us.**

- *“By his light”* we will find a sure guide for finalizing the document on Formation. Formation has no meaning if it does not help to make us aware and to orient our will, our desire for Life. Here on Monday, Michelle, who is very knowledgeable of Blessed Marie-Joseph Cassant, will give us a conference on the Formation received by this brother.
- *“By his light”* we will discern the form to give to the Association that we represent here. You have received the program for the General Assembly and Wednesday morning we will begin the writing of internal Guidelines which have arisen from your questions. *“By his light”* we will better see how to avoid divisive pitfalls in the hard work of giving form to what is being built. We have, at Huerta and Dubuque, adopted our foundational documents. With prudence, his light will allow us to consolidate our *“Bonds of Charity”* in the service of our fraternal communion, aware that the way of Incarnation is still long.
- *“By his light”* the new International Committee will mark out the next stage: Thursday will be the election, to meditate and pray for deeply.

From this perspective, we see well that these two phrases are, in fact, only one. Coming out of ourselves in order to go together to the encounter of an Other, we will approach **all subjects as if they all made only one.**

And we will be sustained, for the light does not only enlighten: **it warms us, it sets us on fire.**

- Warmth of friendship that we bring to all the nuns and monks present here. Thanks to them, to Dom Armand, to Mother Mary Helen who has accepted the role of moderator, thanks to Mother Angelines newly elected abbes of the Congregation of Las Huelgas, thanks to the abbots and abbesses, to the sisters and brothers who have come in some cases from so far away, who bring their communities to be with us here. Thanks to Dom Pierre Andre whose qualities as a teacher have already helped us so much at Dubuque and to which we look forward to here also!
- Warmth of friendship that awaits us at Desert during our day of rest, Tuesday, Feast of Blessed Marie-Joseph Cassant. He will help us to respect the constraints of schedules and of travel. Our monk brothers of Desert, now brother Lay Cistercians who are busy preparing to welcome us. Michelle, who will arrive tomorrow to give us a conference, and whom you will meet and be able to question, Michelle who loves and knows our little Blessed Marie-Joseph, all this will contribute to warming our hearts.
- Thanks to the translators who work so hard!
- Thanks to our organist.
- Thanks to all the French-speaking communities for the gift of local products that they brought to brighten up our breaks.

- A particular thanks to the Assumption, whose Pastoral Counsel decided to support our project. We are more than welcomed, we are escorted; let's be committed to respect the trust they have shown us, by observing such little signs as the times for meals, which is very important. Beginning today, we will be the only occupants of the Guest house.
- Thank you to the Sanctuary of Lourdes. Thank you to the Diocese.
- We have noted everywhere to what point we benefit from the aura of the Cistercian Order in our process of organizing: like a door-opener, a confidence already given, a guarantee of breathing in God! We have nothing to do with it, but what joy!
- Finally, thank you to the Fraternity of Desert. All along this week, they will be at your service. The programs will be posted, every day. There is even someone in charge of the Unexpected!

Now this Encounter is yours. The work of the International Committee, carried out over the course of these last three years, is finished. It is you, now, who will give form and body to what has been sketched out.

If, at the end of the week, when we are going our separate ways, we are still more firmly turned toward Him, Jesus, Source of all Life, Light given for our lives, we have much joy in our hearts! Joy for which the world has so much need!