

Welcome words at the beginning of the Seminar. M. Sophia - Wrentham

*“God, we have received your mercy in the midst of your temple” (Ps 47:10, RB 53.14). This is the prayer Benedict puts on our lips as we receive a guest. Receiving guests is indeed mercy for us, no less than for the guests. Why? Because giving and receiving hospitality, rooted as it is in the gospel and the life of the early Church, helps us to feel the reality of family life in Christ and so brings about communion.*

*The book of Acts, which we hear from daily during the Easter season, is bursting with activity, with trips and travels and visits. In Sunday’s pericope alone, we heard that they went to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, passed through Pisidia and reached Pamphylia, then from Perga they went down to Attalia and finally back to Antioch. What a ride!*

*The epistles, while alluding to Paul’s life on the road, give a complementary perspective, in that each letter allows us to rest awhile with the community under consideration, with its particular flavor, its gifts and its challenges.*

*So here you all are, travel-worn emissaries from, not Pamphylia, Perga and Attalia, but Conyers, Gethsemani, Guadalupe, Mepkin, Spencer and Vina. And here we are, the church of Wrentham, while remaining in one place, ready to receive you as our brothers and envelop you in our life for a time.*

*“They strengthened the spirits of the disciples and encouraged them to persevere in the faith, saying, ‘It is necessary for us to undergo many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.’” (Acts 14:22)*

*We are here together for this purpose: to strengthen and encourage one another. As I see it, this is the root meaning and the fruit of all inter-monastic encounters. When we meet one another, we receive an impression of monastic lives lived by different people in other places. Our hearts are moved to rediscover that we are not alone. Each of us is unique in our character and history, in our monastic path. The places we come from may be different, culturally and climatically. Differences in schedule and customs always give pause for thought, and I’m sure there will be some sweaters needed for those of you used to warmer climes. But from the midst of these variables, what comes to the fore is our common Cistercian monastic identity, our common worries and struggles, and our common joys and hopes. We may not know each other yet, but we are sisters and brothers in Christ, Cistercians, and twenty-first century monks and nuns, in a word: family.*

*My prayer for the Wrentham Junior Seminar of 2019 is that we receive this mercy in the midst of God’s temple: strength to face the hardships we bear as individuals and as communities, and encouragement to look to the kingdom which we are drawn and invited to enter all together. And may we also have some fun along the way!*