Brother Jean-Marie COURCHINOUX

Brother Jean-Marie, Albert Courchinoux, was born in 1942 in Lacapelle-del-Fraisse, in the Cantal. The name of this village means “the chapel of the ash tree”. There was indeed a chapel at the upper end of the cemetery and, beside it, an ash tree—in the local dialect, “fraïssés”—one of whose branches was used to hang the chapel bell.

This small detail aptly evokes our brother’s practical sense: he knew how to find simple solutions and make good use of what was available to him. It also offers a beautiful image of that Cistercian simplicity which brings together the work of the hands, closeness to nature and the search for God.

Brother Jean-Marie was indeed in charge of the farm for many years, having trained at an agricultural school before entering the monastery. He was deeply attached to agricultural work, particularly to growing lavandin in the fields of the former Saint-Étienne farm. There he worked with our former employee Lionel Vernet to develop an innovative machine to make cutting it easier.

But we are getting ahead of ourselves… Brother Jean-Marie came from a family of seven children. The four eldest were three girls and a boy. Then came Jean-Marie and his twin brother, followed by one last sister, the youngest. We are happy to welcome among us this evening two of his sisters, Fernande and Janine, together with their husbands.

His family can bear witness to this: from an early age, he felt a strong attraction to silence and recollection in a church. He even said: “Since my earliest childhood, the place where I am happiest, where I feel most at ease, is in a church.” Surely this was a sign of a monastic vocation!

With a farmer’s common sense, he knew how to seek advice about his vocation. He did so from Father François Bordes, parish priest of Quézac, and Bishop Marty, then Bishop of Saint-Flour. Both encouraged him in his decision.

Thus, after obtaining his school certificate and completing his military service, he entered Bonnecombe at the age of 21. This abbey in the Aveyron was founded in the twelfth century and is now in the Diocese of Rodez. He received the novice’s habit there on 2 July 1964. But four months later, the decision was made to close the monastery! Brother Jean-Marie then chose to continue his novitiate at Aiguebelle. He made his simple profession there on 15 August 1966 and his solemn profession on 11 April 1971. Aiguebelle thus became his community for the rest of his life.

He served for a time as subprior, beginning in 1976. He was also a municipal councillor in Montjoyer for several years, a role he had greatly appreciated.

As agricultural activity declined, he became guestmaster. His goodness, kindness and availability, even when faced with the unexpected, earned him everyone’s esteem and affection.

He also knew how to maintain order in the house. When something displeased him, all he needed to do was frown and say a clear, firm word for everyone to understand. He knew how to express what he thought with complete simplicity, without the slightest trace of aggression.

His care for the life of the house also showed itself in the attention he gave to making it beautiful. I have been told of his love of flowers. He knew how to look at them and bring out their beauty in the bouquets he carefully prepared for the refectory tables.

His presence in the guesthouse deeply touched people from every background and walk of life, and it is no exaggeration to say that the guesthouse had a far-reaching influence during his years of service as guestmaster at Aiguebelle.

We have received much feedback and many testimonies from people who had been deeply marked by Brother Jean-Marie’s very simple words in the guesthouse. Words that enlightened, guided and gave direction to retreatants experiencing sorrow or searching for a way forward.

Brother Jean-Marie was always a much-loved brother. If there was one brother in the community who had no difficulties in his relationships with the other brothers, it was certainly him. He enjoyed everyone's esteem and affection.

This was due to his simplicity, his warm welcome and his almost constant smile. He judged no one and knew how to welcome and listen. He had the gift of reassuring and bringing peace, particularly to people nearing the end of their lives. Some even describe him as "a guide from earthly life to divine life".

And yet, amid all this, there was a striking paradox.

Because of his painful family history from an early age, he had a very pessimistic view of events and, above all, of himself. He constantly belittled himself. His superiors continually had to support and encourage him, restore his confidence in himself and assure him that he fully belonged in the community, where he was highly regarded. Whenever the superior changed—and he knew many—he feared being sent away, something that, of course, had never occurred to any superior. He always judged himself to be a bad monk, although he was admired and loved by everyone in the community.

The closure of the guesthouse during the Covid-19 pandemic had affected him deeply. He remained profoundly vulnerable afterwards. Signs of depression and considerable psychological fragility led to a brief hospital stay in 2021, without it bringing him the help that had been hoped for.

From June 2021 to May 2022, he lived at the Saint-Joseph nursing home in Aubenas. He longed to return to his community, and the brothers were happy to welcome him back.

He was almost 84 years old and had completed 60 years of monastic profession when the Lord called him. He passed away two hours after receiving the last sacraments, surrounded by the brothers.

To conclude, this testimony from our photographer friend Isabelle Martinez: "Brother Jean-Marie showed very great gentleness and patience towards everyone and in all circumstances. His smile and kindness will remain forever in my memory. Since he is now with the Lord, I know that he is at peace, surrounded by gentleness."

May he rest in peace, and may his example encourage us and help us, in our turn, to persevere.







Aiguebelle, 26/11/2026