

Thanks to Bishop Slattery for generously making available the text of his homily at the inauguration of Clear Creek Priory



## On the Inauguration of Contemplative Benedictine Life in Clear Creek

**The Most Rev. Edward J. Slattery, Bishop of Tulsa  
Our Lady of Lourdes, February 11, 2000**

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen. Even the most solemn moments in the Church's liturgy are suffused with an indescribable joy, a radiance that elevates the solemn action of men. And this ceremony-by which contemplative Benedictine life is established with permanence and stability in our Diocese-solemn as it is, radiates with spiritual joy.

It could not be otherwise: for the joy we feel is the promised presence of Christ. He it is who calls us together to offer to His Divine Father that Sacrifice by which mankind is saved, our sins forgiven, and our lives regenerated by the sanctifying indwelling of the Holy Spirit. With Christ we become an acceptable sacrifice and in Christ alone do we become truly holy with the very holiness of God.

How awesome, then, is this moment which we share! How profound the gratitude which must prompt our hearts and motivate our desires, shaping our prayer and directing the actions of this day toward eternity.

Conscious of Him whom we serve, and humbled at his constant invitation to intimacy within the divine community of love, I greet you in the name of the Blessed Trinity. With fraternal love, I welcome my brother bishop; with the unaffected affection of a child, I hold you, Father Abbot, to my heart. I greet you, dear monks of this community of Clear Creek (as well as those who have accompanied Père Abbé from France) with a heart that has learned only one thing, that God is merciful.

And to my beloved faithful of the diocese, the priests, religious, and lay faithful who have come in such numbers today, and who stand and wait like guests at the wedding feast of Cana in the certain hope that today we shall feast together on the Bread of Life, I offer you my deep gratitude, for yours was the steadfast faithfulness that brought about my invitation to Père Abbé, yours the unshakable confidence that here in Oklahoma we could confound the world with the witness of men who prefer nothing to Christ. I greet you all and humbly ask that you consider the events of this day in the light of the Gospel we have just heard.

Saint John tells us nothing of the couple for whom Jesus changed the water into wine. We know neither their names nor their identities. Their past, like our future, lies completely hidden from view. We don't even know if they became believers, consecrating their lives to Him who consecrated the water, and establishing in themselves the first family-cell of the Church. What we do know is that the miracle by which Christ changed the water into wine begins in some sense the "hour of Jesus." This is certainly a beginning, for Saint John is careful to tell us that this miracle was the "first of his signs and by it Jesus did reveal his glory." But the glory of Jesus is his obedience unto death. Only when He is lifted upon the cross, will He be exalted. Only when He lies crushed does He reveal the

height and the depth and the unimaginable breadth of the Father's love for us. Thus Jesus, the guest at the wedding, becomes Himself the Host. Providing for the meal, He provides a way for the disciples to know his glory, and at the same moment Christ begins the hour of his Passion. All this because the servants find the water jars empty, and-obedient to the Lord's command-fill the firkins full.

To the priests and the brothers who are members of this community, I beg you to see in this humble image of the empty water jar the mystery of your vocation, for it was neither in the size nor the strength of the vessel that the jar proved useful to the Kingdom. It was in the fact that they stood empty, waiting for the Son of Man to fill them. Know without doubt, my brothers, that you serve neither the Universal Church nor this local diocesan church by the size of your house or by the strength of your own efforts. You are useful only insofar as you stand empty, waiting to be filled by the Word of the Lord.

Empty yourselves, therefore, of everything else; of all that is not Christ. Let the strength of your own ideas drain away and the wisdom of your own perceptions vanish. Then you will be filled constantly with the Word of God, and your strength will be humility, humility forged in obedience and honed on stability.

Remember, too, that there is no room for anxiety or restlessness in your response to God. He will fill you, in his own time and by whatever means He chooses to do so. You have only to wait for Him, listen for his voice and be attentive to Him speaking in the authority of your superiors and in the weakness of your brother.

As Our Lady said to the servants in Cana, "Do whatever He tells you." Do whatever Jesus tells you; make whatever sacrifice is required of you. Then you will understand the meaning of Christ's passion and his priesthood, for the two are inseparably linked, as the water and the wine are inseparably linked at Cana and again on Calvary. In Cana, Christ begins the hour of his Passion by turning water into wine, and that wondrous sign foretells the Eucharistic sign of Calvary, where the water and the wine flow freely from his pierced side.

This is the mystery which you will contemplate each time you gather in this church to sing the Office and to offer the Sacrifice of the Mass. The pierced side of Christ will be the cave into which you enter to find God, even as your Holy Rule says Saint Benedict entered into his cave that he might search for God and discover his holiness, for holiness is an attribute of God which is beyond all knowledge or insight. It can only be experienced in the silence of the heart where God reveals Himself to those who pray, to those who wait for Him with patience.

It is this same holiness of God that we acknowledge at every Mass when we pass from all our preparatory rites and enter into the Canon. In that most solemn prayer we offer ourselves to God the Father in, with, and through His Son, joining our lives to Christ as He offers the Father his precious Body and Blood. In Christ we become pure with the purity of God, and holy with the holiness of God. This is the unity and the purity and the holiness of God which the one priesthood of Christ reveals and which is made manifest for us at this concelebrated Mass of Inauguration.

I should hope that every lay member of the Church, and most certainly those lay faithful who are the friends and benefactors of this community, consider for a moment the profound meaning of these divine attributes. With the whole Church you proclaim unceasingly the unity and the purity and the holiness of God, and you do so in a world which desperately needs the hope and the promise of the Church, but which, unfortunately, is so marred by sin that it cannot recognize that unity or that purity or that holiness unless you give a radical witness of it.

That radical witness which you are called to give is what we mean by evangelization, but there can be no true evangelization without contemplation; and, as Pope John Paul reminds us, contemplation is the very heart of Benedictine life. Thus we who are in the world to evangelize it for Christ will depend upon the monks of this house in a way far more complete than perhaps any of its members may suspect. In the same way, the monk who freely consecrates himself to God through the voluntary renunciations of poverty, chastity, obedience, through the practice of conversion and stability, all this leading him to a life of prayerful passion and radical detachment, will be the principal evangelizer of our communities; and from the marvelous and wholly divine arrangement by which those in the world are supported by those in the cloister, and those in the cloister are engaged in the most vital work imaginable in the world today, a new American civilization will be born, a civilization of love, rooted in contemplation and alive with the holiness of God.

Beloved members of the family of Saint Benedict, believe me when I tell you that from this house a new civilization will spring. Let it be intensely Benedictine, joyfully Benedictine, Benedictine in the very center of its search for God.

(As your bishop, I will ask you only four things, namely that you pray without fail for me and for the whole Diocese of Tulsa, that we may be worthy of your example and your hospitality; secondly, that you continue to live the Rule of Saint Benedict according to the usages of Fontgombault and the traditions of Solesmes; thirdly, that you conserve and preserve the ancient Gregorian chant, which over the centuries has become such an integral part of the Church liturgy; and finally that you be obedient to the Holy Father, successor of Peter, and to your Superiors according to your rule of life.)

