

Benedictine Life: Passing Through The Narrow Gate

By Father Patrick Brankin

The Eastern Oklahoma Catholic, October 25, 1998

Apart from faith, it is impossible to understand what attracts generous men to the austerities of Benedictine life. And the austerities are many!

First of all there are the physical privations which must be endured: the shortened hours of sleep, the demands of physical labor, and the exhausting intensity of chanting the Divine Office.

To this must be added the mental and spiritual restraints that come from binding oneself to a community of frail men, from having to learn humility from the constant renunciation of self-interest and the discovery that the fountain of charity flows from the cross of community life.

Despite these austerities, however, an increasing number of young men--normal, healthy men, formed by the same cultural values as their peers and subject to the same pressures--have chosen to seek God and follow Christ as monks at the Abbey of Fontgombault and her daughterhouses.

Certainly the stability of monastic life and the timeless beauty of the Latin liturgy might attract someone tired of the instabilities of contemporary life; but the only real answer as to why someone enters a cloister is because God calls some men to give themselves entirely to Him.

"It is an incomparable joy", explained one young monk, " to know that you mean something to someone. To know that you are loved by God, well, this changes your life completely. Then you have only one desire: to give yourself to Him."

In the Benedictine contemplative tradition, this means that the monk submits to a Rule and lives as a member of a family or community under the authority of a Father Abbot.

Besides a Father Abbot, the Benedictine Rule specifies other fathers and brothers, giving Benedictine life the character of a family. But the life is also attentive to both order and hierarchy. Each member of the community assumes his proper place in the life of the house for the peaceful functioning of the whole.

The "Rule" which governs a monastery of the kind that will be established in our diocese is a testimony left by St Benedict to his monastic sons. A book of 73 chapters, written in A.D. 540, the Rule of St Benedict offers a sober approach to monastic life, balancing contemplation with manual labor, and personal prayer and study with the chanting of the Divine Office.

By its demands, the Rule--lived out in concrete situations--encourages the growth of that New Man of whom the Scriptures speak and who--by entering through the narrow gate--gives evidence of the manifold mercy of God.

The following is found on the last page of the special four-page section on Fontgombault and Clear Creek. It describes the site and the history of this foundation in more detail.

Cleo Epps would have a hard time imagining habited monks farming the rocky bottom land that she so carefully accumulated during Prohibition.

The sound of bells erupting in the afternoon's silence and the careful cadence of Gregorian chant would have been

strange sounds indeed to Oklahoma's notorious bootlegger, who assembled the secluded Clear Creek ranch by buying out small cotton and peanut farmers. Epps wanted the land because there was an abundance of sweet water for whiskey and the area was remote even by the standards of rural Oklahoma.

Water was to prove an important consideration in Cleo's life until the end and it was that same abundant water, from Clear Creek itself and from a natural spring on the property [transcriber's note: called Little Clear Creek], that attracted Benedictines to this 1,200 acre ranch in Cherokee County.

Before settling on this property, Abbot Forgeot investigated other properties in Oklahoma and Tennessee, but none of them had the combination of positive factors that drew him to Clear Creek and to its owners, the Stan Doyle Family of Christ the King Parish in Tulsa. "I know it was the beauty that impressed me", said Fr Lawrence Brown, who saw the land after a late summer rain. "What a variety of possibilities Clear Creek can offer a monastery: gardens, orchards, and rich pastures. So much beauty!", he concluded.

As Father Brown explains it, beauty is an essential requirement for a monastery since beauty draws guests and retreatants and fosters a religious atmosphere.

Benedictine life is a family life and as in any family, it is important to welcome guests. That's why the Rule stipulates that guests should be received as Christ Himself, and the Charter (Ad Dei Gloriam) which Bishop Slattery signed allowing the Abbey of Fontgombault to establish this daughterhouse clearly provides for the opening of a guesthouse.

As Fr Brown explained it, 50 to 60 monks, divided between priests and laybrothers, are needed to maintain all the functions of a monastery. It's likely then that the initial 12 men at Clear Creek will be hard-pressed to complete the physical renovation of the buildings at the same time that they begin putting down monastic roots in Cherokee County.

"Contemplative life offers so much to a diocese like Tulsa. It shows people that the religious dimension of life can constitute a life in itself, a life wholly centered upon God."

An interview with Abbot Forgeot

"The Church has proclaimed St Therese of the Child Jesus 'patroness of the missions' similarly to St Francis Xavier. In the case of St Francis Xavier, it is easy to see why; with St Therese it is less evident. She hardly lived 10 years in her Carmel, she did nothing extraordinary, but she led her life perfectly for she understood that her vocation was love. This is the secret of the fecundity of monastic life. This encourages us greatly."

THE MONASTIC VOCATION

"What are the essentials of a monastic vocation? St Benedict enumerates in his Rule the criteria for a monastic vocation: truly seek God and be eager for obedience and humiliation. The contemplative monastic vocation is a call--to follow Christ Who became obedient all the way to death on the Cross, to enter into His prayer, to be attentive to the things of God by spiritual reading and study, to live in charity. As St Therese said, to love is to give everything and to give yourself."

THE VOCATION CRISIS

"The crisis of vocations to the priesthood must not put into question the existence of contemplative monasteries. I would say, to the contrary, that this crisis demands the existence of such monasteries because the crisis cannot be resolved by prayer, as Our Lord taught when He said, 'Pray, therefore, that the Lord of the harvest . . .' (St Luke 10:2)"

PREPARING BY PRAYER

The monks' arrival in Oklahoma is foreseen, if it be God's Will, for September, 1999--after the deep summer heat! The founders are preparing for this "adventure" by thinking of what is possible and desirable for their first installation. However, given the distance, it is really only when they are in the United States that they will be able to obtain what is needed. So it is mainly by prayer that they are preparing for this foundation. I am happy to have this opportunity to ask the prayer not only of the people of Tulsa but also of all the faithful in America. Please recommend our coming foundation to her that has been called the 'Mother of the Americas'.

Historical notes

FIRST A HERMITAGE

In the 10th or 11th century, a hermit by the name of Gombaud came to dwell in a grotto along the left bank of the River Creuse near a fountain which was called after him Font-Gombaud. By the end of the 11th century, this hermitage had expanded into a community of monks under the direction of Pierre de l'Etoile, who in 1091 set out to erect a Benedictine monastery on the north side of the river. Construction of the Abbey continued after Pierre's death (1114) and by 1141 the Abbey church was ready to be consecrated. The rest of the impressive buildings were completed by the beginning of the 13th century.

DECLINE AND REBIRTH

The Abbey of Fontgombault suffered serious setbacks after its initial period of growth. Though it had been fortified with moats and walls, the Abbey was sacked during the Hundred Years War and burned by Calvinists in 1569.

More disastrous still was the practice of the French kings to appoint abbots who collected sizable revenues from the Abbey without being concerned for the spiritual life of the community.

In the 17th century, the Abbey's fortunes changed again under the priorate of Dom Nicolas Andrieu. At the time of his death in 1705, the Abbey enjoyed a reputation for fervor, discipline, and the regularity of its monastic life.

THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

Unfortunately Dom Andrieu's revival was only short-lived and the Benedictine community, suppressed in 1741, was succeeded first by the Lazarists and then by the Society of St Sulpice. During the French Revolution, Fontgombault became State Property and was sold in 1791. The site was used as a stone quarry and the picturesque ruins became a local picnic site. In 1850, the Abbe Lenoir, a diocesan priest from

Bourges [Fontgombault is located in the Archdiocese of Bourges], undertook the restoration of the ancient buildings.

Trappist monks from Bellefontaine and Melleray took up residence; but a series of anti-clerical laws forced them to disperse in 1903.

THE CONGREGATION OF SOLESMES

Fontgombault was definitively restored in 1948 when monks from Solesmes re-established contemplative Benedictine life according to the ideals of Dom Gueranger, whose lifelong work was to preserve the Church's liturgical chant.

The monastery was raised to the rank of Abbey on August 15, 1953 and the restored church was consecrated in 1954. Since then, the Abbey has established three daughterhouses in France. The foundation in eastern Oklahoma will be the first in the United States.

A Most Tenacious Group Of Monks - Oklahoma's Pioneering Benedictines

The French Benedictines who will be establishing a contemplative monastery next year at Clear Creek will not be the first French monks to come to Oklahoma.

That distinction goes to the monks of the Abbey of La Pierre-qui-Vire who established the original (1875) Benedictine foundation near Atoka in the Indian Territory.

The monks of la Pierre-qui-Vire were noted for their strict observance of the Rule. Pope Pius IX once remarked that their life was more "enviable than imitable" and the foundation's superior, Fr Isidore Robot, directed all his efforts to balancing the monks' missionary efforts with their contemplative life.

This was not always easy. Conditions were so primitive as to deprive the monks of even basic necessities. In 1877, the monks, who by then had already founded Sacred Heart Indian School (near Konawa) for the children of the Potawatomi Nation, were still sleeping in tents or in wagons under the open sky. After a disastrous fire in 1901, the Abbey was relocated near Shawnee and in 1915 the school reopened as St Gregory College, making it the oldest accredited institution of higher learning in our state and our only Catholic university in Oklahoma.

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.)

Homily for the Day of the Cornerstone Ceremony

The Most Rev. Edward J. Slattery, Bishop of Tulsa
November 21, 2003

*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.*

If every present moment exists forever in the eternal mind of God and if all that is or has been or ever will be ultimately serves the Mystery of Providence by leading us through the Son to the Father, then we stand in this graced moment, conscious that all of our history converges in this moment.

Thus we are gathered here together on the feast of the Presentation, on a particularly mild Friday in November, in a remote corner of rural Oklahoma, to bless this first stone of the Monastery Church of Our Lady of the Annunciation and we believe with all our hearts that this expresses the will of God and for this reason, for the building of this structure, God brought the first pioneer monks from Fontgombault in France here to Clear Creek.

All things are seen by God and the building of this community was part of the plan and the purpose of the founding of the Benedictine Congregation of Solesmes. Certainly Prosper Gueranger never saw this in his mind's eye, never thought of Oklahoma's missions when he bought the ruined buildings of Solesmes in December of 1832 – but it was for this day and in order that this building be erected that five priests joined Pere Gueranger in 1833 in a restored Benedictine life and for the sake of this day, that Pope Gregory in 1837 raised Solesmes to the rank of an Abbey.

At some point in a mystery too deep for us to fathom, we stand here this afternoon conscious that our ranks are crowded by every saint who ever wore the habit of Benedict, that our number is invisibly increased by every holy monk who ever rose in the first hours of the morning, before the sun, in prayerful anticipation of Our Lord's return, that our congregation is swollen thick with the heavenly attendance of every abbot and every lay brother who over the course of seventeen hundred years, from Egypt to Syria, from Ireland to Ethiopia, from Paris and the Charterhouse of London, to places more remote than this, simply surrendered their lives to Christ in the hard accountability of a rule and a chapter - but surrendered them easily and joyfully, convinced that nothing was to be preferred to the love of God.

The saints of heaven stand here with us and confirm what we do. Though unseen, the angels of God stand here with us to protect what we do. And what we do is build a house that will stand for a thousand years to the glory of God, a place of prayer and

penance, of mercy and redemption, a place where heaven and earth interpenetrate and holiness becomes the cowl we wear to Vespers and the charity of brothers becomes the oil of gladness that anoints the head of Aaron. Here the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ will be offered to the glory of God the Father by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Know for certain, my people, that encompassed within the walls which will be erected here, the redemption promised to Adam after the fall will be offered in its fullness, the sons promised to sterile Abraham will be completed like the sands of the sea, the freedom promised to stuttering Moses will be rendered in full, the kingdom promised to randy David will be crowned and the restoration of a fallen Israel, prophesied by Isaiah, will be accomplished in a single moment of faith, in the heartbeat of a believer, and all those who come to participate in the death and resurrection of Jesus will receive His Body and Blood as a pledge of eternal life.

For a hundred hundred years monks will enter this place as if it were heaven itself, that night and day they might praise the Father for his mercy. In the morning they will anticipate the celebration of the Sacrifice of Jesus and in the afternoon they will recall that same Sacrifice, so that in the continual round of prayer offered in this monastic church, Jesus will center every day and permeate every moment.

We have no idea what the world will be like a thousand years from now, what governments might rule or what technologies we might be known, but we know that here Christ will reign and peace will flourish, until all things are brought together and made one in Him and fallen mankind, redeemed by His blood, is presented back to God, whole and entire.

The Diocese of Tulsa is blessed by the presence this afternoon of Abbot Antoine Forgeot and as the Bishop of Tulsa, I wish to express my personal thanks to Father Abbot, Father Prior and to all the monks of this community. Your continual presence among us with the hidden sacrifices of your contemplative life, encourage us to approach the throne of God's mercy with deeper faith, truer hope, and more honest contrition, that we might live new lives in charity, building those lives on Jesus Christ, the stone rejected by men, but chosen by God to be the cornerstone.

Let me say finally that I wish to offer this day as a new beginning to the Mother of God, on the Feast of her Presentation, invoked under the title of Our Lady of the Annunciation of Clear Creek. Mary is our mother and the model of holiness; as we recall her unconditional fiat - may we surrender ourselves as well to the plan of Divine Providence and trust that God who began this good work in us will bring it to completion.

May Our Lady of the Annunciation of Clear Creek pray for us.

Allocution of Dom Antoine Forgeot, Abbot of Notre Dame de Fontgombault

Brothers and Sisters in the Lord,

I want to thank you also, dear friends of this Priory of Our Lady of the Annunciation of Clear Creek — all of you, present or absent — for the support you never stop giving to us in so many ways. May the Lord reward you and may He hear the prayer of the monks especially at the conventual Mass of each Sunday, which is sung for the intentions of our benefactors. A big "thank-you" also to all those who work on this construction site, at all levels. I know that the work is all carried out in a good spirit. May God bless you all!

You will have no difficulty understanding my haste to give to my little flock a church in which the holy Liturgy can be celebrated more worthily than in our temporary oratory, and a more adapted lodging to shelter the community from the rigors of the Oklahoman climate, in summer as well as in winter.

The construction site, whose foundations Bishop Slattery has come to bless, promises to become one day "something very beautiful for God", to use the expression of Mother Teresa of Calcutta. You can easily guess that its achievement is totally beyond the financial means of the Motherhouse, our Abbey of Our Lady of Fontgombault.

So I want to ask for your help in a very special way. I want to ask you for the support of your fervent, persevering and confident prayer, to ask God to give us the means to bring to term, and without interruption, what has been so well begun. If we ask for it with humility, and if we are faithful, God will raise the necessary help without any trouble.

Thank you again for your union in prayer, especially with the Infant Jesus, our Little King, and with Saint Joseph, to whom we have entrusted our interests. Of course, these are inseparable from Our Lady, the patroness of this monastery. It is for her that we are going to sing now, before a brief friendly encounter and the chanting of Vespers.

Salve Regina.

Allocution de Mgr Edouard Slattery, évêque de Tulsa (Oklahoma), le 21 novembre 2003.

Gloire au Père, au Fils, au Saint-Esprit...

Si chaque instant existe de toute éternité dans la pensée de Dieu, et si tout ce qui est, ce qui a été ou qui sera est finalement au service du Mystère de la Providence divine, en nous conduisant au Père par son Fils, alors nous sommes maintenant dans un tel instant de grâce, conscients que toute notre histoire est orientée vers cet instant.

C'est ainsi que nous sommes rassemblés en la Fête de la Présentation de Notre-Dame, en ce Vendredi de Novembre particulièrement doux, dans un coin reculé de la campagne d'Oklahoma, pour la bénédiction de la première pierre de l'église du monastère de Notre-Dame de l'Annonciation, et nous croyons de tout notre coeur que telle est la volonté de Dieu, et que c'est en vue de la construction de cet édifice que Dieu a amené ici, à Clear Creek, les premiers moines fondateurs venus de Fontgombault en France.

Dieu voit toutes choses, et cette fondation faisait partie de son plan et du projet de la Congrégation bénédictine de Solesmes. Il est certain que Prosper Guéranger n'avait aucune idée des missions d'Oklahoma lorsqu'il fit l'acquisition des ruines du Prieuré de Solesmes en décembre 1832, mais c'était bien pour ce jour d'aujourd'hui et en vue de la construction de ce monastère, que cinq prêtres ont rejoint Dom Guéranger en 1833 dans sa restauration de la vie bénédictine, et que, en 1837, le Pape Grégoire XVI a élevé Solesmes au rang d'Abbaye.

Maintenant, dans un mystère dont la profondeur nous dépasse, nous sommes ici cet après-midi bien conscients que nos rangs sont accrus de tous les saints qui ont porté l'habit de saint Benoît, que notre nombre est augmenté par la présence invisible de tous les saints moines qui se levaient tous les matins avant le soleil pour attendre dans la prière le retour du Seigneur, que notre assemblée est grossie par l'assistance céleste de tous les abbés et les frères convers qui au cours de dix sept

siècles, de l'Égypte à la Syrie, de l'Irlande à l'Ethiopie, de Paris et de la Chartreuse de Londres à des endroits aussi reculés que celui ci, ont en toute simplicité livré leur vie au Christ dans la pratique rigoureuse de la Règle, mais l'ont livrée avec joie et aisance dans la certitude qu'il ne faut rien préférer à l'amour de Dieu.

Les saints du ciel sont ici avec nous et ils confirment ce que nous faisons. Bien qu'invisiblement, les anges de Dieu sont ici avec nous pour protéger ce que nous faisons. Et ce que nous faisons, c'est la construction d'une maison qui durera mille ans pour la gloire de Dieu, et qui sera un lieu de prière et de pénitence, de miséricorde et de rédemption, un lieu où le ciel et la terre se rejoignent, un lieu où la sainteté devient la coule que nous portons pour les Vêpres et où la charité fraternelle devient l'huile d'allégresse qui coule sur la tête d'Aaron. Ici, l'unique sacrifice du Christ sera offert à la gloire de Dieu le Père par la puissance du Saint-Esprit.

Tenez pour certain, ô mon peuple, qu'à l'intérieur des murs qui seront construits ici, la rédemption promise à Adam après la chute sera offerte en plénitude, la postérité promise à Abraham, le stérile, se multipliera comme le sable de la mer, la liberté promise à Moïse qui ne savait pas parler sera pleinement donnée, le royaume promis à David, le pécheur, sera couronné, et la restauration d'Israël déchu, prophétisée par Isaïe, viendra en un seul instant de foi, dans le battement de cour d'un croyant, et tous ceux qui viendront ici pour participer à la mort et à la résurrection de Jésus recevront son Corps et son Sang en gage de la vie éternelle. Pour des centaines d'années, des moines entreront ici, comme si c'était dans le ciel, pour louer le Père pour sa miséricorde, le jour et la nuit. Le matin, ils devanceront la célébration du sacrifice de Jésus, et, le soir, ils feront mémoire de ce même sacrifice, et ainsi dans le cycle perpétuel de prière offert dans cette église monastique, Jésus sera au centre de chaque jour et de chaque instant.

Nous n'avons pas idée de ce que sera le monde dans mille ans, de ce que seront les gouvernements ou l'évolution des technologies, mais ce que nous savons, c'est qu'ici le Christ règnera et que la paix fleurira, jusqu'à ce que toutes choses soient ramenées à l'unité en Lui, et que l'humanité déchue et rachetée par son Sang, soit à nouveau présentée à Dieu, pleine et entière.

Le diocèse de Tulsa est béni cet après-midi par la présence du Père Abbé Antoine Forgeot, et, comme évêque de Tulsa, je veux exprimer ma personnelle reconnaissance, au Père Abbé, au Père Prieur et à tous les

moines de cette communauté. Votre présence parmi nous, avec le sacrifice caché de votre vie contemplative, nous encourage à nous approcher du trône de la miséricorde divine, avec une foi plus profonde, une espérance plus vraie, et une contrition plus sincère, afin de mener une nouvelle vie dans la charité, fondée sur le Christ Jésus, la pierre rejetée par les hommes, mais chérie par Dieu comme pierre angulaire. En terminant, laissez-moi vous dire que je souhaite offrir ce jour comme un nouveau commencement, en cette fête de sa Présentation, à la Mère de Dieu invoquée ici sous le titre de notre-Dame de l'Annonciation de Clear Creek. Marie est notre mère et le modèle de toute sainteté. Tandis que nous faisons mémoire de son fiat inconditionnel, puissions-nous nous livrer comme elle au plan de la divine Providence, et avoir pleine confiance que Dieu, qui a si bien commencé son œuvre en nous, la mènera à son plein achèvement.

Notre-Dame de l'Annonciation de Clear Creek, priez pour nous !

Allocution du Père Abbé de Notre-Dame de Fontgombault, Dom Antoine Forgeot.

Frères et Soeurs dans le Seigneur,

Au terme de cette émouvante cérémonie, riche d'espérance pour l'avenir de notre communauté, je désire vous remercier pour l'encouragement de votre participation. Avant tout, je souhaite exprimer une nouvelle fois à son Excellence Monseigneur Slattery, le bien-aimé pasteur du diocèse de Tulsa, notre profonde gratitude pour la paternelle bienveillance qu'il a accordée à cette fondation monastique dès notre toute première rencontre. Je veux vous remercier vous aussi, chers Amis du Prieuré de Notre-Dame de l'Annonciation de Clear Creek, vous tous, présents et absents, pour le soutien que vous ne cessez de nous apporter de tant de manières. Que le Seigneur vous le rende, et qu'il entende les prières des moines,

spécialement lors de la messe conventuelle de chaque dimanche, qui est chantée aux intentions de nos bienfaiteurs.

Un grand merci également à tous ceux qui travaillent sur ce chantier, à quelque niveau que ce soit. je sais que tout se fait dans un bon esprit. Que Dieu vous bénisse tous !

Vous comprendrez sans peine ma hâte de donner à mon petit troupeau une église dans laquelle la sainte liturgie pourra être célébrée plus dignement que dans notre oratoire provisoire, et une habitation plus apte à abriter la communauté des rigueurs du climat d'Oklahoma, en été comme en hiver.

Le chantier dont Monseigneur Slattery vient de bénir les fondations promet de devenir un jour « quelque chose de très beau pour Dieu », selon l'expression de la Mère Teresa de Calcutta. Vous pouvez deviner aisément que sa réalisation dépasse totalement les moyens financiers de la Maison Mère, notre Abbaye Notre-Dame de Fontgombault.

Aussi, je veux vous demander votre aide d'une façon très spéciale. je veux vous demander le soutien de votre prière fervente, persévérante et confiante pour demander à Dieu de nous donner les moyens de mener à terme, et sans interruption, ce qui a été si bien commencé. Si nous le demandons avec humilité, et si nous sommes fidèles, Dieu suscitera sans peine les secours nécessaires.

Merci encore pour votre aide, merci pour votre union dans la prière, spécialement à l'Enfant Jésus, notre Petit Roi, et à saint Joseph à qui nous avons confié nos intérêts. Bien sûr, ils sont inséparables de Notre-Dame, patronne de ce monastère. C'est pour elle que nous allons chanter maintenant, avant une brève rencontre amicale et le chant des Vêpres.

Salve Regina.

**Address of His Excellency
Bishop Edward Slattery**
to friends of the Annunciation Monastery of Clear Creek gathered at the
Crowne Plaza Hotel
on the evening of **November 5, 2005.**

Ecce ancilla Domini, fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum.

Pere Abbe Antoine Forgeot of Our Lady of the Assumption of Fontgombault Monastery,

Father Philip Anderson and dearly beloved monks of Our Lady of the Annunciation of Clear Creek Monastery,

Father Richard John Neuhaus, our distinguished guest speaker,

Father Abbots, brother priests and deacons, beloved religious men and women and friends of the monks of Our Lady of the Annunciation of Clear Creek Monastery,

Welcome to the Diocese of Tulsa. We are honored by your presence.

This evening I call your attention to the central moment in human history: Two thousand years ago all of humanity waited with fear and trembling for one woman's response. Our hope, the hope of the world, rested on Mary's answer.

Let me repeat those familiar words from the Gospel of Saint Luke: "The Angel Gabriel said, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus.' ... Mary said to the Angel: 'How can this be since I have no husband? The Angel answered, 'It is by the Holy Spirit that you will conceive.'" And now, the words the whole world waited for: "Mary said: *Ecce Ancilla Domini, fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum.* 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done unto me according to thy word.'"

We thank God tonight for Mary's response, for from her response came the Savior of the world.

the world.

We also thank God for leading the monks of Our Lady of the Annunciation to this country, to this diocese, to this hidden, unknown place named Clear Creek right in the center of the United States.

Just as from Nazareth, a hidden unknown place, not even of the map, "the Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us" so from Clear Creek, the Word becomes flesh every day and dwells amongst us, as the monks celebrate Mass and pray the Divine Office throughout the day, every day.

The silent presence of the monks speaks. They remind us to value and cherish that hidden life that was given in Baptism. We need the monks, who, like Mary, live a hidden life. Their very hiddenness challenges us to be like Mary, the lowly handmaid of the Lord silently listening and waiting for the Lord to speak, like a never-ending Advent, waiting and watching for the Lord.

Like Mary, the monks live in perpetual attentiveness to the voice of God who calls because He wants intimacy with each of us. Thus by his very existence the monk is an instrument of God in a world that hungers for silence in its desperate search for an interior life.

Yes, we need the monks. We need them near us. We need their prayers, their silence, their witness.

May the Father of Jesus send down His Holy Spirit so that through the intercession of Saint Benedict He may renew the face of the earth.

Thank you.

Discourse of Father Abbot Antoine Forgeot of Fontgombault abbey

to the families in the neighborhood of Clear Creek,

March 19, 2006.

After praying together for the future construction of our monastery, it is a real pleasure for me to meet you all, dear families who have been attracted to this monastery and live close by. With joy I note that history is always repeating itself: nine centuries ago, in France, the little village of Fontgombault was born near the monastery, and the same is true for many towns in Europe...

We hope that you live in peace with everybody. Since you are like a community of families, clearly each family must keep its own privacy and legitimate differences. Just as with flowers, no two families are exactly identical: and it is very good that this is so. Showing respect for such differences and sharing the same goal of faithful Christian life, you should live in full and pleasant harmony. And should there be any difficulties, you can always take inspiration from the *Holy Rule* of Saint Benedict, which is helpful not only for monks, but also for every man of good will. Saint Benedict says:

"As there is an evil zeal of bitterness which separates from God and leads to hell, so there is a good zeal, which separates from vices and leads to God and to life everlasting. Let monks, therefore, practice this zeal with most fervent love, that is, out-doing one another in showing honor. Let them most patiently endure one another's infirmities, whether of body or of character. Let them obey one another with rivalry. Let no one follow what he judges good for himself, but rather what seems good for another. Let them show the charity of brotherhood with chaste love. Let them fear God, and love their abbot with sincere and humble affection. Let them prefer nothing whatever to Christ. And may He bring us all alike to life everlasting. Amen" (Chapter 72).

I want to let you know what you can expect to receive from the monastery. First of all, the example of a faithful and fervent community living its vocation of prayer and work, *ora et labora*, peacefully and seriously while seeking God and His Glory. That is the best thing we can do for you and give you. Secondly, (and secondarily,) you can receive here the support needed for your spiritual life, particularly from the Sacraments, and occasionally from a visit with a Father (normally once a month for thirty minutes should suffice). You are well aware that the monastery is not a parish, and must not become one, so we cannot give you all the services ordinarily provided by a parish.

Next, let me point out what the monastery expects to receive from you: respect of our contemplative vocation, respect of our solitude and silence, which are so important for prayer. We also hope that you will support us by your own prayer, and your children's prayer — the prayer of a child is so strong upon God's Heart!

We also hope that you will share our spirit and orientations in the present situation of our beloved Mother the holy Catholic and Roman Church. I note, here in the States just as in Europe, a kind of suspicion of the authorities in the Church, of bishops and even sometimes of Rome and the Holy Father himself. Such a position is not good. It is, on the pretense of orthodoxy, a tendency towards the free examination of the Protestants, where everyone judges for himself what is good and what is not. Here,

we have to cultivate the spirit of good sons, filial spirit, of which the *Commentary* on our *Holy Rule* speaks. Saint Benedict writes: "the abbot ought not (God forbid) to teach, or ordain, or command anything contrary to the law of the Lord." And Dom Delatte gives the following commentary: "Saint Benedict's words are not an invitation to monks to scrutinize their Abbot narrowly, so as to make sure that he is a faithful steward and governs correctly. The filial spirit, in accord with the axiom of common law, will always give the superior the benefit of the doubt. The contrary attitude would tend to debase the authority and weaken all discipline. Men do not need to be encouraged to disobey." (*Comm.* p. 38). We have only one Magisterium, that of the Pope, and the bishops united to him.

We are sons of the Church, and this is our security and our joy. We must also be servants of the Church. We must be obedient; we must love the Church, which is nothing other than Jesus Christ Himself. The Church is His Mystical Body. It is clear that here below the Church is still wayfaring, making her way to glory. She is now fighting and often suffering. This has been so from the beginning, and Jesus informed us: "In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (Jn. 16:33). Remember the parable of the good seed and the weeds. The householder preferred that the servants not gather the weeds too soon, "lest in gathering the weeds," he said, "you root up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time, I will tell the reapers: 'Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn'" (Mt. 13:29-30).

And most of all, we must remember Our Lord's promise to Saint Peter, when He gave him the keys of the Kingdom: "I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My Church, and the powers of hell shall not prevail against it" (Mt. 16:18).

We are in Peter's boat, the boat which is the Church, and whatever happens, we are in security there. And we will never have any good reason to leave it, and fall into the sea, in which we will certainly drown. On the contrary, we must always row faithfully following the captain, the Pope, and the Bishops in communion with him.

When we see things that are bad, we cannot say that they are not bad, but we must not make judgments. It is not our task to judge. As Saint Benedict would say, we must "hate the sin, but love sinners." We must suffer because of the bad things in the Church and offer our suffering in union with the passion of Jesus Christ who bore all the sins of all times on the Cross. He suffered from the present crisis in the Church. He offered the humiliations which His Spouse, the Church, suffers, particularly from the abuses in the celebration of the divine Sacrifice of the Mass.

Concerning this crisis in the liturgy, we have to be careful to be balanced in our opinions, without going to any excess. With regard to the two rites, the Holy Church recognizes that we can have legitimate preferences. That is why, as a loving Mother, She allows the traditional rite. But we must never think or say that the new Mass is a bad Mass, or worse still, that it is invalid. It is always the Holy Mass, the Sacrifice of Jesus offered by the Church to whom He entrusted it when He said: *Hoc facite in meam commemorationem*. "Do this in memory of Me."

In all this, we must always be good sons of the Church, in obedience, humility and peace. My predecessor Dom Jean Roy, who worked so hard and suffered so much for the sacred liturgy, and who died suddenly in Rome in 1977, often said to us, his monks: "We ought never to say or do anything that is not theologically sound and in accordance with canon law." This can be taken as a golden rule. It is the rule we follow at Fontgombault, as well as here at Clear Creek. I hope and pray that all of you never take another way.

May Our Lady, the Mother of the Church, keep you and yours and may she, who is the Mediatrix of all graces, give you all the graces you need. Before ending and answering any questions you may have, I would like to read to you what the Holy Father wrote about Our Lady in the conclusion of his first encyclical letter *Deus Caritas est*. After proposing the saints as examples of perfect charity, the Pope singles out the Mother of God as the best example. "Mary," he says, "is a woman of faith, of hope and of love." In the words of her canticle, *Magnificat anima mea Dominum*, Mary "expresses her whole program of life, not setting herself at the center, but leaving space for God... Mary's greatness consists in the fact that she wants to magnify God, not herself. She is lowly; her only desire is to be the handmaid of the Lord. She knows that she will only contribute to the salvation of the world if, rather than carrying out her own projects, she places herself completely at the disposal of God's initiatives. Mary is a woman of hope: only because she believes in God's promises and awaits the salvation of Israel, can the angel visit her and call her to the decisive service of these promises. Mary is a woman of faith: 'Blessed are you who believed' Elizabeth says to her.' [And in the *Magnificat*] we see how her thoughts are attuned to the thoughts of God, how her will is one with the Will of God... Finally, Mary is a woman who loves. How could it be otherwise?" And again: "The words addressed by the crucified Lord to His disciple, to John, and through him to all the disciples of Jesus: 'Behold your mother' are fulfilled anew in every generation. Mary has truly become the Mother of all believers. Men and women of every time and place have recourse to her motherly kindness and her virginal purity and grace, in all their needs and aspirations, their joys and sorrows, their moments of loneliness and their common endeavors. They constantly experience the gift of her goodness and the unfailing love which she pours out from the depths of her heart (...) The devotion of the faithful shows an infallible intuition of how such love is possible: it becomes so as a result of the most intimate union with God, through which the soul is totally pervaded by Him — a condition which enables those who have drunk from the fountain of God's love to become in their turn a fountain from which 'flow rivers of living water' (Jn. 7:38). Mary, Virgin and Mother, shows us what love is and whence it draws its origin, and its constantly renewed power" (nos. 41 and 42). May she keep all of you and your children under her mantle of purity, charity and joy. Our Lady, Queen of families, pray for us.