

TO BUILD SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL FOR GOD

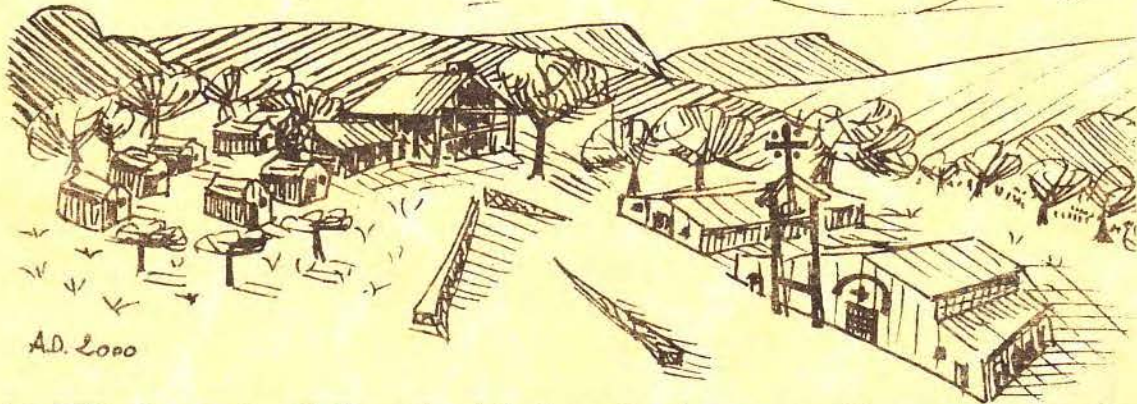


For those who do not know us, we would like to introduce ourselves. Our Lady of Clear Creek is a foundation of the French Benedictine Abbey of Notre Dame de Fontgombault and a member of the Congregation of Solesmes.

Monastic life was established in France in the Fourth Century, but, after the French Revolution, no monasteries remained there. In the early 1800s, a young priest named Prosper Gueranger was convinced that the best thing he could do to restore a rich Catholic life to France was to found a monastery under the ancient Rule of Saint Benedict. In the order of faith, the interior life holds the first place; that once assured, he thought, the rest would follow. He wanted to stick to the essentials of Benedictine life: prayer, study, and work in God's presence, with a special focus on liturgy, all in a warm family framework built around the abbot. To assure that essential, he chose to follow a monastic life without the added pastoral charges of schools or parishes -- a purely contemplative life. So together with a few priests he founded Saint-Pierre de Solesmes in 1833. Solesmes grew quickly and soon founded other monasteries; these formed the Congregation of Solesmes.

The monastery of Fontgombault had been founded in 1091, and monks from Solesmes restored it in 1948. In the early 1970s, American men began entering Fontgombault, and it seemed that God was leading up to a foundation in the United States. In the 1990s, Abbot Dom Antoine Forgeot began to search for an appropriate site; Providence eventually led him to Oklahoma, where His Excellency Edward Slattery, Bishop of Tulsa, graciously welcomed the idea of a foundation. Father Abbot discovered a beautiful and remote piece of land in the wooded hills of the Ozark Plateau, about forty-five miles east of Tulsa. There he decided to found a monastery consecrated to the Blessed Virgin Mary under the title of her first joyful mystery: Our Lady of the Annunciation of Clear Creek.

Father Abbot arrived with the main group of founding monks on September 15, 1999. The first founders were thirteen in all: eight from the United States, three from France, and two from Canada. All had been formed at Fontgombault and had lived there or at one of her daughterhouses for some twenty years. On February 11, 2000, the monastery was elevated to the status of a priory with Father Philip Anderson as prior. The abbot of Fontgombault remains its superior until, God willing, Clear Creek becomes an abbey in its own right. Fontgombault has continued Solesmes' great monastic and liturgical tradition, as well as her dedication to the Holy See, and her daughterhouse at Clear Creek is determined to do the same.



The monks of Clear Creek believe they have something precious to offer America. First, the presence of a contemplative monastic community is a basic good, serving as a center of the interior life. Prayer is the primary good of all Christian life, both for the individual and in the broader sense of the Communion of Saints. Saint Therese of Lisieux saw contemplative orders as being like the heart of the Church, the heart which gives life to the rest of Christ's Mystical Body. We need today, perhaps more than ever, little islands of peace and silence where all converges toward the glory of God, toward lifting the soul up to God, toward being attentive to God.

This is true not only for the monks and for young men who desire to join them in their quest for God, but also for guests. Hospitality is an integral part of the Benedictine life. Christians come into this little oasis, away from the noise and distractions of the world, and are able to take back into their lives something of what they receive here. And what, exactly, do they receive? In general, a sense of the sacred; a sense of peace; the feeling of God's presence; and, often, a knowledge of how better to make use of creation according to God's plan. Many Americans seem to be realizing how much we need the contemplative, spiritual dimension in our lives and how important such centers of spiritual life, prayer, and doctrine can be. Monks of the Solesmes Congregation do not normally preach formal retreats, but they do help guests participate in their life, especially in the liturgy, and guests are invited to see a priest for spiritual counsel and confession.


Let's add to this influence of the monastery the example of a group of men living only for God. The Second Vatican Council underlines the role of religious orders in reminding us that this life on earth is not our final destiny. Monastic life, led silently and joyfully before God, is a persuasive, irreplaceable witness to the fact that God is active in our lives, that He cares for us, and that He alone is enough to make us happy.

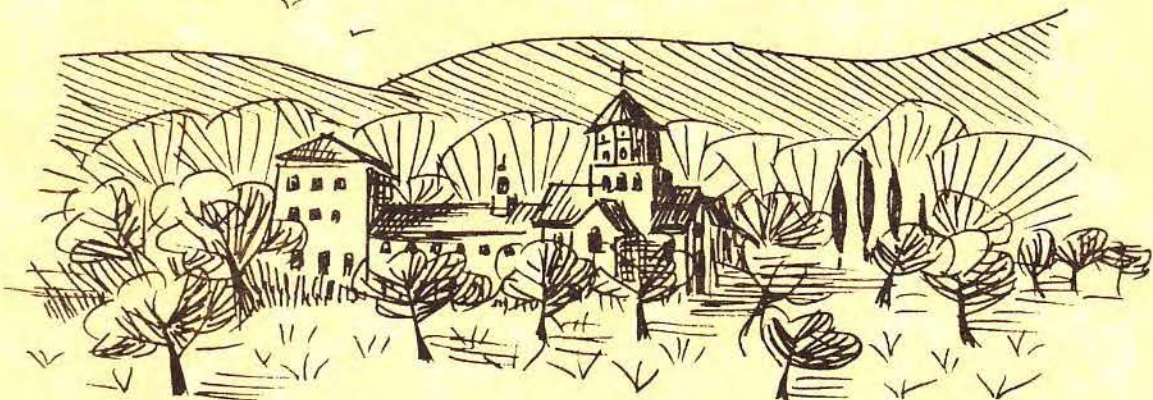
The center of this life is the liturgy with its two components: the Holy Eucharist, celebrated at Mass; and the Divine Office, or Liturgy of the Hours. Clear Creek Monastery, like Fontgombault and Solesmes, celebrates Holy Mass and the Hours in Latin, which is a language especially appropriate to our solemn liturgy and helps us appreciate the sacredness of liturgical prayer. Along the same lines, and with Rome's approval, Fontgombault and her foundations celebrate Holy Mass according to the ritual of 1962, often referred to as the Tridentine Mass, which is a form of worship we find particularly well suited to our monastic life.

Concerning Gregorian Chant, which is sung in the liturgy at Clear Creek, Saint Pius X spoke of the importance of praying in beauty. This applies to us all. In worship, all things should help lift the soul to God and to the invisible and be a reflection of His Beauty. Even the site and the buildings, all the material elements, should converge with the spiritual ones for God's glory. For the monks, and for their guests, everything in monastic life is organized to promote "the One Thing Necessary" (St. Luke 10:42).

We are blessed with a very appropriate monastic setting: the hills and valleys, the creek's transparent waters, high rock bluffs where eagles soar, prairie meadows, silence and solitude. The ranch buildings, already here when we arrived, have been suitable enough for a beginning. A big log house provides us with a kitchen and refectory, a couple of workrooms, and cells for some of the monks. We have transformed a horse barn into a chapel and more living quarters. The former caretaker's cabin serves as a guesthouse, and other barns and sheds are used for cattle-raising and other practical needs.

However, in order to lead a full monastic life in the Solesmes tradition, we will need truly monastic buildings, in particular a monastic church. Already many young men desire to join us, and we are faced with the dilemma of turning away vocations or finding a way to make more room than the present buildings provide.

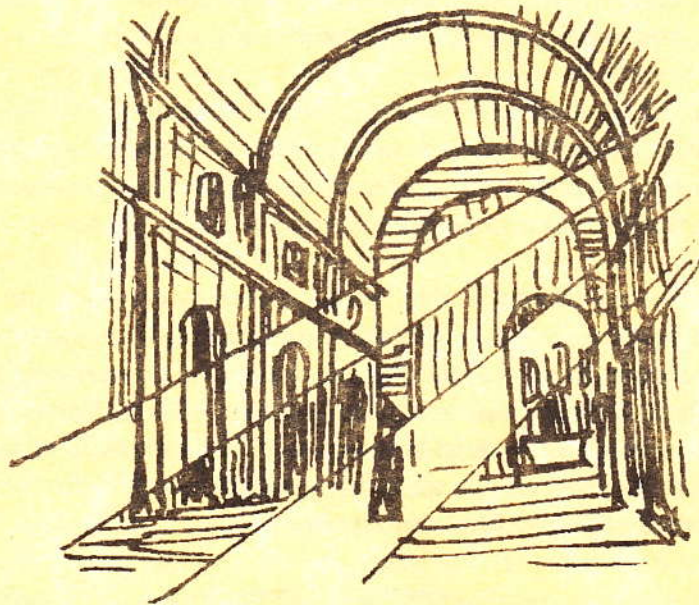
 So this is why we are turning to you. We have already chosen a site on the property for the permanent monastery buildings and have engaged the services of an architect. Thanks to his evocative images, reproduced in the renderings which accompany this text, we think you will see for yourselves that the monastery we hope to build will indeed be very much in harmony with our monastic life. We want it to be a place that will inspire all to lift up their hearts to Heaven, to be "something beautiful for God," to use Mother Teresa's expression.



Monastic life has always been a collaboration between monks and lay people to do something beautiful for God. We raise cattle and sheep; we have planted an orchard and a garden; we do our own cooking, make our own clothes, handle our own maintenance work as much as possible. The scope of this larger building project, however, is far beyond our means, both financially and in terms of manpower. Of course, we shall collaborate in the construction to the utmost, doing our best to keep costs down. Fontgombault and our French friends will help generously. But we must turn to you, our American benefactors, to help make Clear Creek what it must become.

May God bless you for the help you give us, whether it be financial support to buy the needed stones and mortar or simply prayers to help build up the invisible spiritual edifice. The important thing is to put into practice the wise saying of the Rule of Saint Benedict: "That in all things God may be glorified" (Chapter 59).

May Our Lady, "Morning Star" of the New Evangelization so often referred to by our Holy Father (and to which we wish to contribute in our monastic way), smile graciously down upon you and your families.



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