



✠ Our Lady of the Annunciation of Clear Creek

Lent, 2003

Dear Friends of Our Lady of the Annunciation,

The just shall flourish like the palm-tree; he shall grow up like the cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the Lord, in the courts of the house of our God.

In the light of recent revelations concerning acts of horrible abuse committed by members of the Catholic clergy, these words, taken from Psalm 91, might seem something of a cruel joke, an increasingly impossible ideal. How will any boy or girl be able to grow up strong in the Faith, to “flourish like the palm-tree,” when these unspeakable forms of scandal bring such bitter disillusionment to their young souls? Apart from the tragedy of clerical scandals, we are all aware of the spiritual bankruptcy of our materialistic societies, where the Lord and His Gospel have been all but banished from popular culture and the decision-making sectors of public life. What is the remedy?

Our Holy Father, the Pope John Paul II, seems to think the time has come to bring out the “heavy artillery,” for this spiritual combat, by having recourse to a means which has worked so effectively in periods of crisis in past ages, that is to say the Holy Rosary of Our Lady. His Apostolic Letter, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, published last October, has already found a deep echo in the hearts of Catholics in every walk of life and merits to be studied and meditated upon by all: “Mary constantly sets before the faithful the mysteries of her Son, with the desire that the contemplation of those mysteries will release all their saving power. In the recitation of the Rosary, the Christian community enters into contact with the memories and the contemplative gaze of Mary.” (*Rosarium Virginis Mariae*, no. 11.)

In order to meet the challenges, so numerous and so far-reaching, which appear on the horizon, we intend to live this year, in a particular way, according to the motto, which the Holy Father chose as the guiding light of his pontificate almost twenty-five years ago: “Totus tuus,” “All yours.” This spiritual program, condensed into the formula taken from the works of Saint Louis-Marie Grignon de Montfort, seems ideally suited to help us focus on what is most essential in the days we are living. It reminds us that all our prayers, in order to surely reach the ears of God must pass through the intercession of Our Lady, and that all the many graces we receive mysteriously pass through her Immaculate Heart: in order to belong entirely to God, we need to entrust ourselves entirely to her.

Last Fall, on the Feast of the Presentation of Our Lady (November 21st), in the presence of all the monks and a few of our faithful friends, I formally consecrated the foundation of Our Lady of the Annunciation of Clear Creek to that same Immaculate Heart, before the statue of Our Lady, which had recently been installed in the monastic Oratory. On that occasion, after expressing to the Blessed Virgin the many thoughts of thanks and devotion that were in all our hearts, I added the following words: “We want to commit to her care, in addition to the present, the entire future of this monastery—its growth, *et merito et numero*, with good and strong vocations—and the buildings needed to lead more suitably our contemplative life.”

On the same Feast of the Presentation of Our Lady, of this year 2003, by the grace of God, we hope to see the blessing of the first stone of our monastic church, the plans of which we have been working on now for so long. Bishop Slattery of Tulsa has kindly accepted to preside over the ceremony. Thanks to your prayers and generosity, despite the very great financial

challenge these large constructions continue to pose for us, we believe the first phase of construction will have progressed enough by then to make such a ceremony possible. This is certainly encouraging for us, as I am sure it is for you as well. Indeed, Our Lady and Saint Joseph are taking good care of us, not to mention the Infant Jesus, whose statue found a new place in our monastic Oratory a little over a year ago.

A holy card, with a photo of the statue on one side, accompanies this letter. You might notice, at the feet of the Infant Jesus, a little white sack. That sack contains the entire life savings of an eight-year-old boy named John who died of leukemia shortly after visiting Clear Creek in 2001. He remains—undoubtedly—our greatest benefactor, at least by the exchange rates of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Another item included with this letter is a page of the latest (and very accurate) graphic representations of our future church. I hope they will help you appreciate the purity and beauty of our architect's design, which reflects, we feel, in a most remarkable way, the simple but powerful spirituality of the Benedictine ideal. In addition to these graphics, you will find some photos of work already in progress, i.e. a new road leading up to the future monastery site and a triple-arch, stone bridge spanning Little Clear Creek.

Although novices come and go—such is the very nature of the Novitiate, where the process of discerning God's will takes place—our community in Clear Creek is still growing in number and, hopefully, in merit. One monk in simple vows is presently studying Theology at the Motherhouse, back here in France. Another is doing his pre-theological studies (Philosophy) at Clear Creek. In addition to three in simple vows, we now have three who are canonical Novices and five Postulants. Many young men continue to knock on our door as well, which is always a welcome sign.

Various small but significant improvements have been made this past year in the buildings and grounds of the temporary monastery, where we will have to survive for at least a few more years. Metal awnings have been put up to shield monks' cells from the summer sun. A small cloister garden has been arranged between the barn building and that which houses the Novitiate and chapter room. The wood workshop, now in full operation, has already produced a good amount of furniture for our needs within the monastery, in particular a handsome set of choir stalls. Several of our monks are currently working to acquire the skills needed to develop a line of quality, handcrafted furniture we can sell to help support the monastery.

Our Brangus herd is continuing to prosper, and the sheep, under the protection of their faithful Pyrenees guardians, are multiplying in peace. There is always a great deal of work to be done in order to maintain and improve our rather vast wooded areas, which will provide firewood to heat the new monastery as well as lumber for the wood shop. A certain number of men, among you, have just recently come to generously assist us in these more rugged, outdoor tasks.

As the world continues to labor under the threat of a drawn out war, amid the uncertainties of a languishing global economy, our goal remains the same: to build something beautiful for God, to make Clear Creek a place where souls can "grow up like the cedar of Lebanon, planted in the courts of the house of our God," near the living waters of Divine grace, under the gentle gaze of Our Lady of the Annunciation.

+ fr. Antoine Fepach
Abbot of Notre-Dame de Fentzenbault.

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