Help Us Build Something Beautiful For God

Lent 2005

Dear Friend,

Lenten greetings to you from Clear Creek Monastery. The response to our Christmas mailing was most encouraging, and we want to thank each and every one of you who contributed to this monumental undertaking to build "something beautiful for God."

Many of you wrote me regarding the Gregorian Chant CD, expressing your appreciation for being able to share in this most beautiful prayer of the Church. Many of you also wrote requesting that I share some of the history of the construction project to date. It has been a fascinating journey and I am happy to recount the story.

Long before we selected an architect, we already had a fairly precise vision of what the monastery would look like. We wanted to firmly root our monastery in the rich Benedictine tradition as it was handed down to us through the mother-house of Fontgombault Abbey, a magnificent Romanesque monastery reaching back nine centuries.

With little hesitation, we selected Dr. Thomas Gordon Smith of Notre Dame as our chief architect. Dr. Smith is widely renowned as one of the primary proponents in the resurgence of classical architecture, especially with regard to Catholic churches. We knew that he would whole-heartedly embrace our Benedictine Romanesque tradition.

The selection of the engineers proved to be an interesting experience. Some of those we contacted declined the offer because they were more attuned to conventional buildings, such as schools and shopping centers. Others were strongly attracted by our project: to build something to last a thousand years was a unique


challenge, and the idea of building a monastery promised to be spiritually enriching. I was up front with the engineers. I let them know that monks can be very demanding: behind our quiet and prayerful demeanor we recognize our keen responsibility for this project before God and the extended community. But I assured them that in the end all would work out for the greater honor and glory of God.

During the design stage, Dr. Smith made regular visits to Tulsa to work with the engineers. Although none of the engineers is Catholic, we experienced a unique spirit of collaboration. Each member of the team made the effort to understand not only the practical requirements, but the spirit of the monastic life as well.

This remarkable spirit continued during the construction phase led by the general contractor and the workers on the site. Everyone performed his work with seriousness and self-donation, in the conviction that working on this project was a privilege. We have been blessed by the absence of any injury. In addition, the superintendent had expressly forbidden any swearing or smoking in the crypt even from the earliest stages of the construction. This order was willingly respected, and as the laborers demonstrated a quiet and respectful demeanor, we already had the feeling of being in a church.

A monk visited the building site every day. His presence showed the builders that although the monastic community remained occupied with its own duties, it directly supported the construction work through prayer.

The blessing of the first stone by Bishop Slattery, in the presence of Father Abbot of Fontgombault and of hundreds of friends and faithful made everyone aware that the construction had been at once material and spiritual. A director of our contracting company emphasized the cultural legacy of the building: "The only
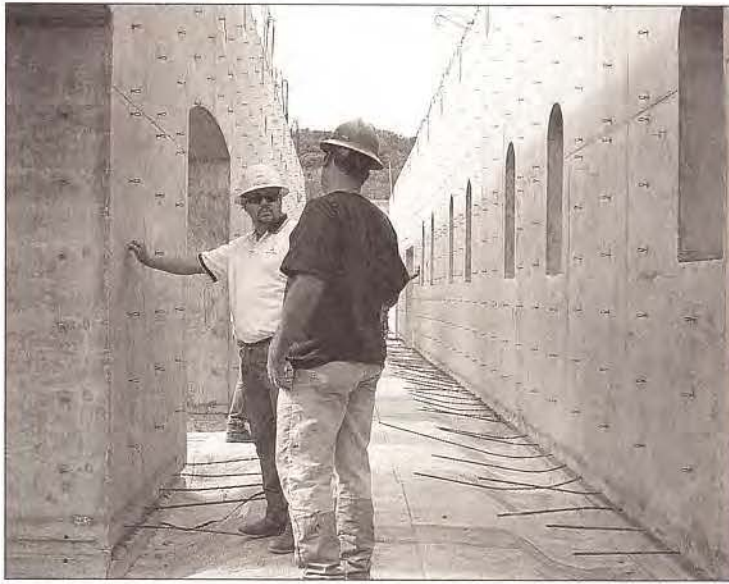
solid buildings we work on are prisons. In two or three centuries, what are people going to think of our contemporary civilization? This monastery will show that we have something else to hand over to future generations."

Since March of last year, the construction site has returned to silence. The rebars emerging from the vast crypt stand like quiet sentinels, waiting to receive the upper walls. The crypt with its circular chapels and its arched window gives a sense of peace and majesty. The three-foot thick walls are a silent testimony to the enduring nature of the project.

A solid and beautiful church has more than a cultural value. It is a confession of faith. Monks sing in choir several hours a day, but they preach very little. Their church and their lives speak for them. Through vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience they make a limitless donation of themselves. As a community we show our consecration in the hierarchy of our buildings. The monks' cells are simple. We place our main resources in the church. There, we achieve our Benedictine vocation by glorifying God in the solemn Liturgy. We want to make our church beautiful and lasting out of love for God's glory.

The dedication of a church is a monumental event in the Benedictine life. When the monastic church of Fontgombault was rededicated on October 5, 1954, the ceremony lasted without interruption from 8:00 am until 3:30 pm. Those present retained a vivid memory of the extraordinary occasion, speaking of "hours of eternity." We have a very special love for the hymn of the Dedication, *Urbs Jerusalem*, which comes back to us often:
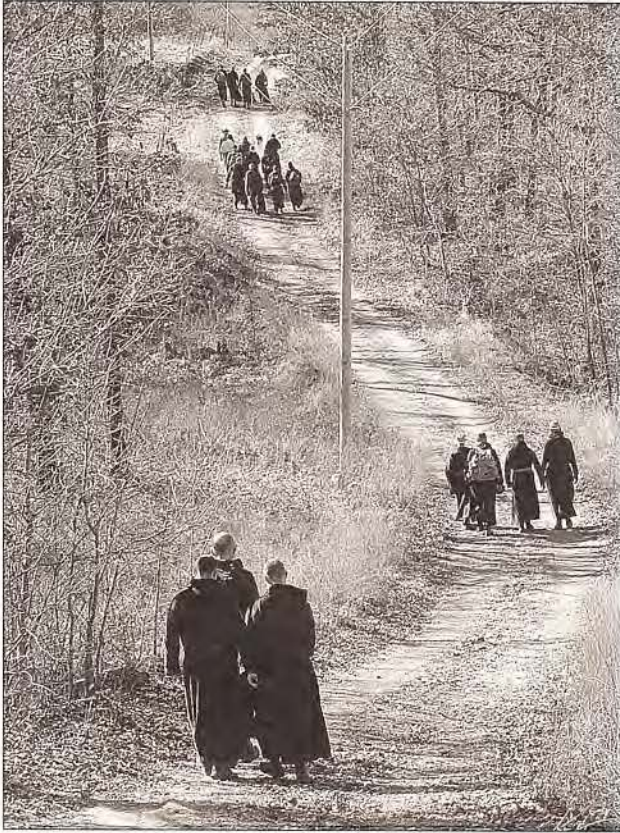
Blessed city, Jerusalem
Vision of peace well named,
Who art, in heaven
Of living stones constructed,
And crowned with Angels,
Like unto a bride with her maidens.

As we look forward to the day on which we can celebrate the dedication of our church here in Clear Creek, much remains to be accomplished. There is still much money to be raised, and much construction to be done. But to us, the commitment to build the church right at the beginning is a symbol of our very life. We trust that if we prefer nothing to God, He will not forsake us.

And so we would humbly ask you not to forsake us either. The important thing is that we all work for the greater glory of God and of His Church on earth. If each one offers just a stone, this miracle can happen — even in an obscure corner of the Ozark hills. Thank you again for your generous, ongoing support and may Our Lady obtain many graces for you in the New Year of grace.

br. Philip Anderson, Prior

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