



## A Christmas Walk

January 2007

Dear Friends of Clear Creek Monastery,

It is customary for the monks to take a walk in the countryside on Thursdays, usually for about three hours. We sometimes remain within the limits of our own property; on other occasions, we follow the little roads that wind about the area or the paths that traverse the forest. In Advent and Lent, however, in order to do penance, we abstain from the Thursday walk, remaining at the monastery to perform manual labor or other tasks. One especially appreciates the walk right after Christmas, after being deprived of it during the preceding weeks.

This year, our Christmas-week *promenade* occurred on December 28, feast of the Holy Innocents. After the office of None, we met as usual in the only room big enough for us to gather, which is the refectory. There, alongside the Christmas tree (a rather large red cedar of which there are a great number on our property), propped up in a corner of the room, are laid out all the Christmas cards our friends have sent us, which the monks are allowed to read during the days following the Nativity. As the monks gather to receive bits of news before the walk, they devour the cards like little children going after presents on Christmas morning.

Although the deeper mystery of Christmas is uppermost in our thoughts (in addition to the liturgical texts, we have a spiritual reading during the meals: this year it was Dom Gueranger's *Liturgical Year*, a marvelous way to get to the meaning of the feast), it would be alien to true Catholic culture to deny the more human joys of Christmas their rightful place. And so we set out on our "Christmas legs" to conquer the pleasant December afternoon, under sunny skies and a light southern wind at our backs.

It takes awhile to reach our front gate, about one mile from the temporary monastery where we still live. On Thanksgiving of last year, we had turned right on this country road outside the gate, heading south. This had led us past several of our new neighbors, friends who have moved into the area in order to be close to the monastery. Quite a few of them have come to Oklahoma from California, seeking a more Catholic environment and life at a slower, more human pace. I guess it is the inverse of the California "gold rush" or of the migration of the "Okies" during the great depression of the thirties, made famous by Steinbeck's novel, *The Grapes of Wrath*. Now it is the culturally "poverty-stricken" people of the West Coast moving to the Midwest in search of a place where children can still be children and can keep their faith.

On this Thursday after Christmas we turned north, following the gravel road which hugs our property line for a mile or so. In this direction too, most of the houses are now occupied by

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friends of the monks, and several pieces of land have been cleared in order to be put on the market for others to come. Off to the right, out of view, there is the new house of a courageous lady from Maryland, who was one of the first to build. At a sharp bend in the way, we come to a little yellow house where a family with quite a throng of young children has just settled. A little girl of about three comes out with her mother to greet the brothers. She is visibly proud of the angel wings she is wearing, a Christmas gift no doubt. Her brothers are busy playing with toy trucks in front of the house, while a baby swings in his rocker on the porch.

On the road again. We pass a low-water bridge that is rather dangerous when the creek rises. A lady who has lived here for many years was once swept off the concrete in her car by the terrific force of the water (fortunately she was not hurt). We then take a blacktop road which turns away from our property, following it to a rather spacious piece of land, made up of pastures and a little forest of red cedars. As the owners are friends of the monastery (Californians again!), we can cut across the open pastures. As we enter the property, near the entrance, we pass the new place of the grandparents of the clan. Moving along, hoping not to disturb anyone, we cannot resist sitting down on the dormant grass for a few moments to contemplate the peaceful countryside.

But we have been spotted. Tommy, an energetic young boy, comes over to join us, having received permission from his father and the older boys who are installing a large water tank in the barn to collect rain water from the roof. He does not say much, but seems to appreciate the monastic company. It is time now to head back in the direction of home, but we are intercepted by the rest of the family: the men coming from the barn and the women folk from the house. The eldest daughter leads the younger ones and the mother brings up the rear with the most recent member of the family. Everyone is in the Christmas spirit and appreciates the impromptu meeting with the monks. We can only say "Merry Christmas," however, as we have other places to visit and sights to contemplate.

After reciting the Rosary in small groups, walking at a brisk pace back along a road parallel to the one we came on, we climb the hill to reach our back gate. Having no key, we have to climb over. We make our way across our top pasture and down the other side through the woods of oak and maple trees and emerge upon the site of the new monastery. To our delight there is at last some very visible progress. Scaffoldings rise above the concrete floor of the residence building. Back behind the work site, concrete mixing plants have been set up. Great quantities of various materials have been unloaded here and there. A new era begins. . . .

The purpose of the little sketch of our monastic walk during the week of Christmas is to give you a little idea of what is happening at Clear Creek and a sense of our thanksgiving for all that God has done here in the past seven years. We are most grateful to you, our friends from far and near, who have done so much to make it happen. The essential is something spiritual, but this spiritual "something" manifests itself in many visible and wonderful ways. Please be assured of our prayers that the blessings we receive may be shared by all of you. May the Infant who rules the world from His crib have mercy on us all and may His Virgin Mother smile down upon you.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Br. Philip Anderson, Prior". The ink is dark and the handwriting is fluid and personal.

br. Philip Anderson, Prior of Our Lady of Clear Creek