



WIND-BATTERED HOUSE

. . . and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock (Mt. 7:25).

September 2011

Dear Friend of Clear Creek Abbey,

On May 22nd one of the most devastating tornadoes recorded in modern American history (the 7th deadliest) or in world history (the 27th) ripped through the mid-west. You may not have been aware — nor was I, being in France at the time for the General Chapter meeting of the Benedictine Congregation of Solesmes — that Clear Creek Abbey was directly in the path of this storm. It touched down in Joplin, Missouri as a ER5 multiple-vortex tornado, claiming more than 150 lives and wreaking some \$3 billion of destruction. These storms generally move in a northwestern direction. Just take a look on a map where Clear Creek (near Wagoner, Oklahoma) is in relation to Joplin.

Here is how one of the monks at the Abbey described the tempest of that evening:

On Sunday night, during dinner and afterwards — during dishes and rosary — the weather changed all of a sudden, so that the air was super heavy. The sky went green like algae. The wind started up, and then, just before the rain fell, we got a wave of hail which fell like mothballs (one of our neighbors received baseball-sized hail, which he kept in his freezer to display). At this point the monk in charge of the ranch said that the radio was warning of tornados for Cherokee County (where we live). I went to check the local weather reports, and there was an indication of a tornado already passing beyond us, heading further up state along Grand Lake, and another which was following it, coming right for us.

Conditions having reached the point where we should be going to the basement, I found Father Prior in the guesthouse and explained to him the situation, amidst howling winds which were already bending the trees, and rainfall that was flying sideways. He agreed that it was time to seek shelter, and so I rang the bell with the special signal that means “take shelter.” We all descended to the library (underground). A little later, when the time for the office of Compline came, Father Prior suggested that we move to the crypt where we normally conduct the Divine Office, since it is a safe area. It was about this time that Bishop Slattery called to send his blessing (he left a voice-mail), as he knew we were in great danger. As we entered the crypt chapel, the storm outside was quite audible, and the rain really began pounding on the concrete slab above, in a deafening, steady downpour, sending water through the little openings in the temporary ceiling so fast that the buckets were filling up within a minute or two.

As the acolyte sang the lectio brevis and we made our examination of conscience, you could see outside the windows (our crypt is only underground on one side) the trees bent sideways and the rain flying horizontally against a very dark sky. But then, just as we began the office of Compline with Deus in adiutorium, the fury broke and the storm began to dissipate, while the main body of the atmospheric disturbance moved on. The buckets were filling less and less rapidly, and we were able to hear ourselves chanting, without difficulty. When it came time for the aspersion, I was debating if there was any chance that I could ring the Sunday Regina Caeli on the big bell outside the crypt, and so I decided to go and open the door to take a look. When I got to the door, I was surprised to find that no rain was falling at all. The setting sun was illuminating a clear evening sky, and there was no wind at all.

As many of you know, that we have been engaged in building a major portion of our abbatial church since last fall. On May 22nd, the day of the storm, much had been accomplished on the site, but the unfinished structure remained vulnerable to the violence of such a storm. In the end, thanks to God and to the Holy Angels and their Queen, no damage was done to our church under construction.

And now, to the immense joy of the monks and of the friends of the monks, the current phase of construction is very near completion! There stands, for all to see, the abbatial church of Our Lady of Clear Abbey, in all its youthful splendor. True, the church is not complete, lacking the full height of the nave and the complement of the full sanctuary. But what has already been completed is most impressive and a happy presage of things to come. We are most thankful to God for this and quite indebted to your immense kindness. We hope you can share a bit of the joy we are experiencing after so many years of waiting. At last we have a true sanctuary in which to conduct Holy Mass and the Divine Office. Barns and stables are fine, but . . .

Finally, we realize even better now how wise the idea was to build something solid, something that would “last a thousand years.” . . . *and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock (Mt. 7:25).*

Just as in times of danger for the Faith, it is most important to build our lives upon the apostolic solidity of the Faith of Saint Peter and of his successors, likewise in the material realm there is wisdom no doubt in investing some time and resources in constructing the necessary framework of a serious monastic existence upon a sure base.

Please help us continue to build something beautiful for God in America’s heartland, both by your prayers and your material support. And please come see us!

+ br. Philip Anderson, abbot

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P.S. about website