



THE AWAKENING OF A VILLAGE

January 2015

Dear Friend of Clear Creek Abbey,

Our abbey is nestled on the flank of a rocky hill. Some call it a mountain. Situated all around this hill-like mountain covered with oaks are various houses and clusters of houses that make up what is sometimes referred to as Clear Creek Village. There are dwellings elsewhere, but the greatest number lie at the foot of this hilly eminence. No one is pretending that there is here a village in the full sense of the word; however, something very much like a village is beginning to emerge from this human clay. Something is awakening. Perhaps a case in point could illustrate what I mean.

As I write this letter, the primitive shelter perched on the scaffold above the front door of the church is empty. It is from this dizzying perch that our resident sculptor has been patiently summoning those mystical shapes of Christ in majesty, drawing from the limestone tympanum the figures of Christ surrounded by the four living creatures (described by the prophet Ezechiel that came to symbolize the four evangelists). But today all is quiet; he is not working. Why?



For one thing, the bitter cold makes it hard to stand all day with tools in hand, vying to make hard stone yield to the will of man. This does not happen without a fight. If a theological vision of things is to impregnate this unyielding matter—so as to raise to Heaven the souls of all those who will pass through this great portal in order to attend the Most Holy Sacrifice of Mass and the canonical hours—a victory must first be achieved. A victory must be won over the elements that have remained unfriendly since Adam and Eve (pictured in the sculptures, by the way) first lost their way and ours too. To say the thing more briefly, it is quite hard to chisel limestone when the thermometer falls below the freezing mark. But there is another reason for the empty booth.

When families and individuals friendly to Our Lady of Clear Creek began to move into properties surrounding the monastic mountain, they came with a vision, that is to say a very noble and beautiful ideal of life that would take form in the shadow of the abbey walls. They saw themselves as post-modern men and women, abandoning the sinking ship of an overwrought and decadent

civilization, fleeing back to the fields, back to the sanity of rural life. They imagined themselves becoming farmers and ranchers, resurrecting the lifestyle of most Americans until a century or so ago. They were right. However. . .

However, as anyone who has lived in the country for any length of time knows, “the best-laid plans of mice and men often go (quite) awry,” and a certain harsh reality will destroy many a fair dream. The soil here is poor and hard to work. Farming is a pursuit that has known better days in America. The critical moment comes when a choice must be made whether to “give in” or “give all.” At Clear Creek the challenge is being met with various degrees of success and failure, but the saga continues.

Now, where did our sculptor go (other than home for a cup of hot tea)? It seems that a great collaboration has begun. I am speaking here, not as a spokesman for the villagers, but from my far-off, monastic perspective, viewing the village from a distant observation post. Whereas at the beginning of the migration to Clear Creek Abbey each family was pursuing its own dream, it seems now that a certain common effort has begun to take shape. Already there exists a small but prosperous business that produces reading materials for home-schooling families, with a classroom that is a kind of embryo of a school. Already there is music in the air, as a very well-trained choir continues to recruit from among the younger would-be-villagers.

A more recent project is now under way, involving the creation of a village center, where products of a cottage industry may be displayed for sale, giving villagers more opportunities to earn a living without having to commute to the city. A small restaurant is also in the works. Some of the village elders, those having experience in the world of business, plan to initiate the younger ones into the work. The idea is that the many visitors to the abbey will also pay a visit to the village, where they might purchase items that are handmade and of quality, in preference to buying the cheaper, but lesser products of our hyper-industrialized age found in big stores.

And the sculptor? Oh, yes. After his tea he went to work at the village store site, drafting plans, creating a truly remarkable scale model, and preparing to set up a forge. He is also a blacksmith, you see. It is hoped that he can teach others his craft, while making beautiful and useful items for the village.

But in this area, round about the monastic mountain, all roads lead to the abbey, which is the spiritual center, the necessary reference point that enables each and every member of the emerging village to rise above the constraints and servitude of the merely material. God is at the center, and there is, perhaps, no richer expression of God than in the solemn monastic liturgy, celebrated seven times a day and once at night. All roads lead to the abbey, and the sculptor will soon be back on his platform, standing between Heaven and earth, like some stylite of past ages. There he will continue to create, with the help of grace, a tangible vision of the Heavenly Jerusalem, a hymn in stone to the glory of God, of the Blessed Virgin Mother of God, and of all the angels and saints. Perhaps some day you will come and meet him and the other villagers living near the monastic mountain of Clear Creek. All are more than welcome.

+ br. Philip Anderson, abbot

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