



FROM THIS PLACE

November 2018

Dear Friend of Clear Creek Abbey,

Contemplating the calendar invites us to look beyond the present moment, whether to the past or to the future. Together with this calendar I am sending you, I offer a few reflections on the past, present, and future of Our Lady of Clear Creek Abbey.

In a homily given at the Mass for the official opening of our monastery on the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes, February 11, 2000, the Most Reverend Edward J. Slattery, then bishop of Tulsa, made comments that seemed to take on a prophetic character:

...[T]he monk who freely consecrates himself to God through the voluntary renunciations of poverty, chastity, obedience, through the practice of conversion and stability, all this leading him to a life of prayerful passion and radical detachment, will be the principal evangelizer of our communities; and from the marvelous and wholly divine arrangement by which those in the world are supported by those in the cloister, and those in the cloister are engaged in the most vital work imaginable in the world today, *a new American civilization will be born*, a civilization of love, rooted in contemplation and alive with the holiness of God...Believe me when I tell you that from this house *a new civilization will spring*. Let it be intensely Benedictine, joyfully Benedictine, Benedictine in the very center of its search for God.

We monks would be guilty of spiritual pride (a serious sin) were we to take those words of Bishop Slattery as praise for our poor little persons, as if God were somehow in need of our labors in order to run His universe. Such is clearly not the case and not the meaning of the bishop's address. On the other hand, we monks realize, no doubt better than others, that there has been, and still is, something wonderful at work here at Clear Creek, something greater than the human agents involved, bigger than ourselves. Perhaps, indeed, God will cause a new civilization to spring forth out of the humble beginnings of our monastic adventure, despite our human limitations.

It has been more than 19 years now, since the Clear Creek founders arrived at Tulsa International Airport, late on September 15, 1999. By God's grace much has been accomplished since that memorable landing! We have grown from 13 to 52 monks. From the transformed horse barn that constituted our first monastic habitation—we called it our “cowboy Bethlehem”—we have moved into a substantial (though incomplete) set of buildings perched on a nearby hill, looking much like a monastic citadel, one we hope will last a thousand years. We have at present a well functioning ranch, a very productive vegetable garden and orchard, shops of every sort,

a bustling bookstore, and other important facilities, all of which assure the material livelihood of the community.

Since we arrived in 1999, 28 men have made their monastic profession here, and 11 have been ordained to the sacred priesthood. We are teaching philosophy and the first cycle of theology inside our walls in addition to providing a religious formation to postulants and novices. One of our young priests is currently pursuing a graduate degree in theology at the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas (the *Angelicum*) in Rome. Another monk-priest acts as chaplain for our contemplative nuns in Westfield, Vermont, and two other monks are lending a helping hand to a Benedictine community in the Netherlands. Our novitiate currently numbers 14, with more to join us soon! For all of this we are, indeed, blessed and thank God with heartfelt fervor.

But there remain some glaring holes in this idyllic picture—some gaps to fill in! Whereas we spend a great deal of our lives chanting the Divine office in choir as prescribed in the Holy Rule, we have not as yet a complete church in which to carry out these sacred duties. That our abbatial church is still under construction is all too apparent, especially when the weather turns sour and some rain drips down upon us. We are often at the mercy of the brutal Oklahoma sun and of the rigorous cold that sweeps down from the North in this intemperate climate. Worse yet, 15 of our monks must live in very primitive living quarters, dwelling in modified sheds as well as in an old trailer, and will have to stay out there until we can erect a much needed second residential building. While it is good for monks to live in poverty, it would be better that each lives in a proper cell, guaranteeing at least relative safety from tornados and the fierce storms that occur in this part of the world.

Yet, we feel a need to complete the monastic church before we build another residential building. The glory of God comes first. Our current plan is first to erect the bell tower over the crossing of the church. The following phase would see the nave rise to its true height, with clerestory windows to bring in some light! How wonderful it would be, were we able to build both the bell tower and the clerestory part of the nave at the same time, thus saving much expense and making it possible to install some heat against the chills of winter! But God, in His loving Divine Providence orders all things for the best, “in measure, in number, and weight.”¹ We know we must wait patiently for the day when our completed abbatial church will receive its solemn dedication. What a feast that will be!

Please help us fill in some of the “gaps” that challenge us at Clear Creek. Your prayers and material gifts, large and small, are always greatly appreciated. We consider you to be part of the family, and it is a family that is happily growing. May God bless us all with courage to fight the good fight for the Truth, Goodness, and Beauty that He is. May Our Lady be ever by your side.

+ br. Philip Anderson, abbot

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¹ Wisdom 11:21.