



THE NOBILITY OF SERVING

November 2019

Dear Friend of Clear Creek Abbey,

It was ten years ago, on November 15, 2009, that our Father Dom François de Feydeau left us for God, after an aggressive brain tumor stole his earthly existence. For this true monk, illness and death were all part of the program of Christian perseverance and monastic life. Toward the end he wrote:

I am preparing myself for any eventuality, without anxiety and in peace. I am in the hand of God, to whom long ago I dedicated my life. All my life He has done nothing but good to me. [In facing death] I am following the straight line of my monastic vocation... What is important for me and helps me greatly is to understand the meaning of what is happening to me: I accepted this illness, not only for myself, but also for the foundation of Clear Creek Monastery.



Dom de Feydeau was, in fact, among the founding members of our monastic community, who came to Oklahoma twenty years ago. He was 57 years old when he died, in the 33rd year of his monastic profession, and the 27th year of his priesthood. He was naturally gifted: he graduated with honors from the French Naval Academy before entering the Benedictine Abbey of Notre-Dame de Fontgombault.

At Fontgombault Father took on important responsibilities, including those of assistant master of novices and of gate keeper. Early on he showed certain special gifts for teaching children catechism, often employing in the cause his unique style of drawing. (We have a whole book of his drawings that illustrate the history of the first ten years of Clear Creek.) He also became the beloved assistant of the religious community of the Disciples of the Lamb, a women's community that welcomes postulants from all walks of life, including those with Down's Syndrome.

During the ten years he spent at Clear Creek, Dom de Feydeau was entrusted with a number of important tasks including those of sub-prior (second in command in those days), of cellarer (overseeing all the community's work), of master of ceremonies, and of lecturer for the students.

Around the time when Dom de Feydeau left us in 2009, Father Prior Bethel, who had been a fellow novice at Fontgombault Abbey in France, wrote down a number of memories in a journal entitled *My Brother of Profession*. Here is a passage from that account:

He felt very early the call to religious life. He said that while still in Africa [where he was born, as his father was working there], he used to pretend he was a hermit. His mother had to be absent part of the day, and François was often all alone with nothing to do, so he

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prayed... Already as a little boy he wanted to be a monk and never wavered in his decision. In 1969 at the age of 16, young Monsieur de Feydeau went to Fontgombault Abbey and asked if he could enter. He was very young, but it seems they took his request seriously. His father, however, was dead set against his boy “wasting his talents” in this way, so young François had to await his majority. He had been a French sea scout and was interested in sailing... He therefore went to a military preparatory school for a year and then entered the naval academy at 18... After his graduation in the spring of 1975, this young naval officer finally entered Fontgombault. I remember a charming young fellow with his hair brushed up a bit in front. He was *gentil*: that is, kind, courteous, affable... Brother de Feydeau was the ideal novice: joyful, generous, prayerful.

Dom de Feydeau was both a man of faith, rooted in the spiritual simplicity of the Gospel, and a multifaceted personality capable of carrying on a variety of tasks at once. One of his more memorable contributions to the development of Clear Creek was his active influence in shaping the architectural plans for the nascent monastery. Kirk Kramer, in an article for the *Tahlequah Daily Press* (November 25, 2009), relates the following:

Thomas Gordon Smith, a professor of architecture at Notre Dame University...worked closely with de Feydeau...who had a big influence on Smith’s design for the new church and monastery at Clear Creek, an influence based on de Feydeau’s deep knowledge of the distinctively monastic styles of architecture employed in Europe during the Middle Ages.

But no one more admired Father François de Feydeau than his own abbot, that is to say his second Fontgombault abbot, who had also been his Father Master in the novitiate for a time, the Right Reverend Father Dom Antoine Forgeot—who was the abbot who founded Clear Creek. Here is what Dom Forgeot wrote soon after Father de Feydeau’s death:

Father de Feydeau was like an incarnation of our monastic tradition, which he had so well understood, which he loved and which for him had become second nature (*velut naturaliter*, Chapter 7 of the Rule). His entire being was penetrated with the monastic temperament that we love, made of obedience and humility, of renunciation, of fervent zeal for all the works of charity that are compatible with our monastic life. In a word his life was spent, both in the presence of God and in an intimate search for God by all possible means, especially in prayer, both private and choral, as well as in *lectio divina*.

Such beautiful testimony hardly wants a commentary or anything to be added. Let me just add a final quote from Father de Feydeau himself.

Yes, God has had much importance in my life... I am therefore full of thanks for Him and happy to offer Him the life that I received from Him. I would like as well to be able to give it for my neighbor and to place it in the hands of the Blessed Virgin, in such manner that she be enabled to do with it whatever would please her Son. May she obtain for me to die with all the love and thankfulness possible. I want to die like a true monk and a son of the Church.

May he continue to intercede for us all, monks and friends of monks, as the adventure of the next ten years of Clear Creek begins already to unfold.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "+ Br. Philip Anderson, abbot". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

br. Philip Anderson, abbot