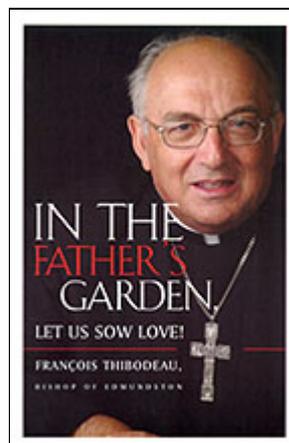

IN THE FATHER'S GARDEN LET US SOW LOVE!



First book published by Bishop François Thibodeau, C.J.M.

In God's Garden, Let Us Sow Love!

Who could have imagined that one day I would publish a book composed of some of my weekly reflections, under the title *Au jardin de Dieu, semons l'amour!* - "In God's Garden, Let Us Sow Love!" It is thanks to you and to particularly providential circumstances that this book has seen the light of day. I hope that it will make agreeable and beneficial reading, and that it may even be of much use to you, at certain sleepless moments! I hope that with God's help an English edition will be available in a few weeks.

Background

In January, 1994 the editor of *Le Madawaska* newspaper invited me contribute to a weekly column reserved for pastoral subjects; this was a happy and unexpected invitation. In like manner, editor and publisher Mrs. Anne Sigier of Québec, at an unscheduled meeting about the time the diocesan services resumed activities, was the cause of a happy surprise - and of panic! "Bishop Thibodeau," she said, "Have you made a choice of articles for publication? I am awaiting your selection. It would be a good idea to publish by the end of October, this year." Flabbergasted by such an offer, I called her the following morning to tell her I had thought about her offer and that I would follow up on it as soon as possible. Which articles would have greater pastoral interest? What about the mechanics of the book, to make it as appealing as possible? Should I really publish? These questions haunted me for several days - and several weeks!

What Garden?

In his incomparable parables recorded especially in chapter 13 of St. Matthew's Gospel, Jesus compares the Kingdom of God to the seed. "One day the farmer went out sowing..." What then is God's garden? It is bigger than our planet! We have yet to learn about its cosmic dimension. It is as intimate as the sanctuary of the human heart and as vast as the visible and invisible universes! The Garden of Eden gives us an idea of its dimensions: it covers all the fields of thinking, of culture, of social, political and economic life as well as of religion. Still, this garden where God is pleased to meet humans is a place unlike any other. Greater than Central Park but as beautiful and even more so! Psalm 95 proclaims: "In his hands are the depths of the earth, and the tops of the mountains are his." Then the psalmist reveals which attitudes are required, to enter the garden: "Come, let us bow down in worship; let us kneel before the Lord who made us. For he is our God, and we are the people he shepherds, the flock he guides." The Master of the garden is the Lord, who holds the world in his hands.

What Seeds?

Throughout the 500-odd articles I wrote each week since coming to Edmundston in January, 1994, from these 50,000 lines I wrote since that time, I selected only 52 articles written since the year 2000. I grouped them under six headings or chapters: seeds of gratitude and wonder, seeds of life and hope, seeds of solidarity and justice, seeds of catechesis and spiritual growth, seeds of vocations, and seeds within the Church community. I am very much aware that these pastoral reflections can only evoke one or the other situation. However, my hope is that these evocations are like seeds planted in the soil which is the heart of readers and potential readers.

Let Us Sow Love

If it had not already been used as a title, my book would have been called "His Love Is from Age to Age," because I really want every article I publish to be an unfolding of the Love discovered, recognised, and proclaimed around us. Far from being severe exhortations, hammerings on the pulpit, or getting carried away, each weekly reflection is meant to be a reflection of the Father's love which Jesus revealed to us and continues to reveal daily. The first words of the Conciliar document on "The Church in the Modern World" gives the tone of all pastoral statements: "The joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor and afflicted, are the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts."

The Garden of Our Church

As I am about to begin another decade as fifth bishop of Edmundston, my desire is to direct my reflection on the future of our beloved Church. Following the pastoral priorities set by the Diocesan Synod and different diocesan councils, I have let myself dream about the future of our Church! As I share these dreams with you, I suggest that you do likewise, that you dream, too! Beginning with the actual needs of our people, the needs of our children, our youth, our adults and elderly, let us allow our hearts and imaginations to soar to the year 2015... Let us imagine how alive our Church will be if catechesis and religious education are ensured. What good news we will share! Imagine how alive our Church will be if family and youth ministry are active in each one of our parishes. What solidarity and creativity we shall experience together! Imagine how alive our Church will be if each one of our thirty-two parishes have an active pastoral team comprised of a few newly-ordained priests and religious brothers and sisters, and a few newly-committed lay people to join those already involved in ministry. What renewal and what surge of vitality there will be in our parishes! Imagine how alive our Church will be if it can count on sufficient financial resources not only for the maintenance of our buildings but especially for pastoral work at every level. What growth and sharing, each of our parishes will experience!

A Wish

If my book contributes to make known to you the Father's love for each and everyone of us, and stimulates our Church's renewal, the sowing of these seeds will not have been in vain! Enjoy the book, and especially the harvest!

+ François Thibodeau

+ François Thibodeau, C.J.M.
Bishop of Edmundston

« From A Bishop's Journal » - November 12, 2003