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## « O Beloved Church! »



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**YOU ARE A GIFT THE CHURCH WE LOVE SO WELL  
YOU SPEAK TO US OF FREEDOM, PEACE AND JOY  
DEEP IN OUR HEARTS, FOREVER YOU WILL BE  
A BEAUTIFUL PROJECT, A MEETING-PLACE OF LOVE,  
A BEAUTIFUL PROJECT, A MEETING-PLACE FOR US!**

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20 October 1994  
Anniversary of my Episcopal Nomination

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In the coming weeks, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of our diocese, I want to deepen with you our understanding of this mysterious reality which is the Edmundston Diocesan Church. With you also I offer my thanksgiving to God for this marvellous Church of Edmundston which is given to us and which we form together. For most of you, this is the Church which made you through Baptism members of the people of God and the Body of Christ. What a beautiful gift from God; what solidarity we must have, and what responsibility is ours, in the midst of the Church. May the following lines incite us to personal and community gratitude for everything that has been experienced in this diocese these last fifty years; may they also be an invitation to live deeply this great mystery of our faith.

### **GOOD NEWS IN THE MIDST OF WAR**

It was during the Second World War that Pope Pius XII created a new diocese on December 16, 1944, called the Diocese of Edmundston and made up of Madawaska County, [southern and western] Victoria County, and the western part of Restigouche County, all of which had been, until then, integral parts of the Bathurst Diocese. On August 14, 1944, on the occasion of the episcopal ordination of Bishop Marie-Antoine Roy, O.F.M. the Apostolic Delegate, Archbishop Ildebrando Antoniutti, said: « Your ancestors built this country with tears and suffering, but always under the protection of the Virgin, the shining and bright star in their lives. Mary guided, sustained, encouraged and strengthened them all through the long pilgrimage of their lives. A people so devoted to Mary cannot do otherwise than find its way and its true glory. »

## AN IMPORTANT ROLE

The papal delegate then went on to describe the role he foresaw for our Edmundston diocesan Church: « The new diocese is the crowning achievement of the apostolic work accomplished in this region with a zeal and perseverance above all praise. By its geographic position, this diocese is destined to play an important role in the religious, cultural, and social relations of two illustrious provinces. [...] » The Delegate then recognised the builders of the Diocese: « This beautiful cathedral will remind future generations of the vibrant and active faith of the Edmundston [Diocese] population. » With you I thank these persons: « Honour and glory to all our founders; we are proud of them, and this is our story! »

## 1944-1994

A good number of our compatriots could tell us at length about the events that have marked the history of our young Church. For example, you can ask those couples who were married in 1944-1945 what happened that year, and I am sure that they will proudly and happily tell you about it. The fifty years of Church life are well documented by a number of articles and monographs and personal recollections, and a number of institutions also bear witness to those years. A forthcoming publication will highlight our diocesan history. In each of our parishes and within our homes the heart of the budding Church of 1944 still beats strongly, though oftentimes unbeknownst to those around. I hope that each family take the time to talk about all that has been experienced through the years, all that was beautiful, holy, and grand in your home which is like a « domestic Church, » since there also an intense Church life can be experienced and celebrated. In the course of the numerous get-togethers throughout this holy year, it would be nice to have family celebrations highlighting the values which motivated the lives of your parents and grandparents: may these values which they passed on to you continue to flourish in your homes. All of this is part of the Church we form. With you I exclaim: « We are proud, this is our daily life! » If only we took the time to look, listen, and love, this Edmundston Diocesan Church would truly be a motive for thanksgiving and marvelling.

## WHAT THEN IS THE CHURCH?

If Church life extends to all that we are and all that we do, what then is the Church? Four major documents can help our reflection: on August 6, 1964, Pope Paul VI published a remarkable encyclical letter entitled *Ecclesiam Suam*, on the paths along which the Church must carry out its mission in the world of today: the paths of awareness, renewal, and dialogue. The timeliness of this document is still apparent. Three months later - November 21, 1964 - the same pope promulgated the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, which had just been voted on by the Second Vatican Council. On December 7, 1965, Pope Paul promulgated yet another master document, the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* on the Church in the Modern World. Finally, on October 11, 1992, Pope John Paul II published the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. In this our jubilee year, these four major texts can inspire our reflection. Regarding the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, let me point out that numbers 748-975 deal exclusively with our profession of faith, « I believe in the Holy Catholic Church. » The new Catechism presents a vision of the Church within God's plan; the Church: People of God, Body of Christ, Temple of the Holy Spirit; the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church; the faithful of Christ: hierarchy, laity, consecrated life; the communion of saints; Mary: Mother of Christ, Mother of the Church. In this section you will find answers to your questions and reasons for giving thanks.

## « I BELIEVE IN THE CHURCH. »

Where does the Spirit blow? The Creed answers this question when it states: « I believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. » The Church asserts that in her and through her the Spirit of Jesus continues to act in history. The Church believes that she is the place and even the sacrament, that is, the sign and instrument of the action of the Holy Spirit. To express the indispensable bonds that must exist between the Church and Jesus Christ, I believe that the words of Pope Paul VI during the Second Vatican Council, can nourish our reflection. The Pope stated that « If Jesus Christ is not her riches, then the Church is pathetic. She is barren, if the Spirit of Jesus does not develop in her. Her edifice is shaky if Jesus Christ is not the architect and if, from the living stones with which she is built, his Spirit is not the bond. She is without beauty if she does not reflect the unique beauty of Christ's face and if she is not the Tree whose roots are the Passion of Jesus Christ. The

science she takes pride in is false, and false also the wisdom which adorns her, if these do not find their fullness in Jesus Christ. She maintains us in the shadow of death, if her light is not 'illuminated light' from Jesus Christ. Her entire doctrine is a lie if she does not proclaim the Truth that is Jesus Christ. All her glory is vanity if she does not place it within the humility of Jesus Christ. Even her name is a stranger to us if it does not immediately conjure up for us the only Name given to man [and woman] for their salvation. She is nothing to us if she is not the sacrament, the effective sign of Jesus Christ. »

### **A CHURCH-AS-COMMUNION**

In the course of these reflections it will be easier for you to understand certain dimensions of the marvel of the Church-as-communion, of the marvel of the Church as People of God: a profound union which joins each baptised person to Jesus himself, Christ and Lord, Son of the Living God. Each child of God is bound to the Holy Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In the bond of charity, all baptised persons are linked to one another to form the People of God, a sign of God's love for humankind. This Church-as-communion is also composed of and served by ordained ministers whom the Lord has chosen for himself and who are in living communion with the successor of Peter: the bishops, priests, and deacons. The structures within this Church are at the service of her mission, at the service of communion, fellowship, and welcoming of one another. This same Church-as-communion proclaims the Good News from which she was born: she is 'servant' of the men and women of today, especially of the poor and suffering; her liturgical and sacramental life is supremely important: it is the expression of her unity, her vitality, her life.

### **STRIVING TO SHARE**

Calling to mind a few aspects of our Church gives rise to an invitation: my greatest desire would be that we deepen our knowledge of the Church throughout this jubilee year, in sharing groups, religious education, associations and organisations, and in the different parish committees. If preaching, retreats, conferences, and talks had the mystery of the Church as topic, how all of this would be beneficial to our diocesan Church of Edmundston. I would go so far as to encourage - even within our Sunday celebrations - the careful and systematic presentation and clarification of the teaching of the Catholic Church on the mystery of the Church. I strongly encourage this teaching in a special way during the three great periods of the liturgical year: Advent (November 27-December 24, 1994), Lent (March 1-April 15, 1995), Easter Time (April 16-June 4, 1995). I am certain that the liturgical texts will be most appropriate for such an undertaking: « The Edmundston Diocesan Church, Place of Our Hope, » « The Edmundston Diocesan Church, Place of Our Faith, » « The Edmundston Diocesan Church, Place of our Love. »

### **A MARVEL TO CELEBRATE IN HOPE IN FAITH**

In this manner the Advent period will help us better understand and celebrate the Church as the pre-eminent place of our Christian hope. The Advent themes and sub-themes all focus on hope, this year. « In hope, we raise our heads » (First Sunday), « Let us follow the guide » (Second Sunday), « Let us share the peace » (Third Sunday), « Let us welcome the Lord » (Fourth Sunday), « Let us celebrate! » (Christmas). May what we profess in the Eucharistic Prayer for Mass Meetings become a certainty for all humankind: « Make of your Church a place of truth and liberty, of justice and peace, so that all men and women may have reason to keep on hoping. » During Lent 1995, we could together look at the topic of the beautiful risk of our faith: may these days of reflection and solidarity help us to better follow Jesus (First Sunday), grow in the faith (Second Sunday), act today (Third Sunday), welcome his joy (Fourth Sunday), and open to the future (Fifth Sunday).

### **ON A DAILY BASIS: LOVE**

Thus nourished by the Word of God during the course of Advent and Lent, we shall be all the more ready to experience together the Paschal Season as a special time given us to grow in love. Following the example of the first believers, we are called upon to have but one heart (Second Sunday of Easter), to lovingly shepherd the flock (Third Sunday), to be evangelisers of mutual love to the ends of the earth (Fourth Sunday), to live the new commandment of mutual love (Fifth Sunday), to spread this love in the midst of the difficulties and differences of today (Sixth Sunday), and to be witnesses moved by the Spirit (Ascension). In this way, the liturgy will help us discover the marvel that is our Edmundston Diocesan Church.

## **SPECIAL MANDATES**

On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of our Diocese, I want to give my brothers and sisters of the Diocese special commissions in order to help us live deeply the virtues of faith, hope, and love in the midst of our Church and for service to our brothers and sisters of today.

## **ELDERLY BROTHERS AND SISTERS**

During this jubilee year I give you the following liturgical text to help you discover even more this marvel that is the Church:

« Church of always, listening to the world, do you hear the forces of history boiling ?  
The earth is racked with a dull violence, it is famished for unity, and seeks deliverance.

Church of always in service to the world, root your faith in the foundation of our distress.  
Unbind this quivering hope, as it sets out along the path of anguish and promise.

Church of always, Gospel to the world, free from fear the earth that gives birth.  
Baptise in the Spirit the sprouting of its seed, flow on as a river of peace, and carry our history. »

## **SUFFERING BROTHERS AND SISTERS,**

I offer you the following:

« If hope has made you walk further than your fear,  
your eyes shall be raised and  
Then you will be able to carry on until the advent of sun of God.

If suffering has made you shed tears of blood,  
your eyes shall be washed.  
Then you will be able to pray with your crucified brother.

If sadness has made you doubt, on the evening of abandonment,  
you will know how to carry your cross.  
Then you will be able to die as did God-made-Man.

If your weakness makes you fall along the road,  
you will be able to stretch out your arms.  
Then you will be able to dance in the joy of forgiveness. »

## **BROTHERS AND SISTERS WHO WORK AND LABOUR EVERY DAY,**

I offer you these words:

« Jesus Christ, keystone rejected by the builders but unique in the eyes of the Father,  
we sing our joy at being in you living stones set into your dwelling:  
a mysterious communion that love enriches and binds.

From these lives which suffering has carved and chiselled,  
from these stones where hope has engraved its newness,  
you build the sanctuary where the Spirit of God resides,  
and the Church is the witness of salvation to our world. »

### **BROTHERS AND SISTERS WHO FORM THE YOUTH OF OUR CHURCH,**

I offer to you these lines written by our young people:

« If you receive the gift of God, you become a covenant sign;  
If you share the love of God, you become His presence in the world.

The beloved Son leads you to your Father,  
the Spirit of Jesus comes into your heart,  
the Spirit of Jesus transforms your life.  
Be grafted to the Tree of Life,  
come and share the joy of believers, come and labour at the worksite of the Church. »

### **TO YOU MY BAPTISED BROTHERS AND SISTERS**

I offer these lines that tell us what we are through baptism:

« A people that celebrates the new Easter,  
a people that passes from death to life,  
a people that God has acquired for Himself,  
Church of the Lord. A people rooted in faith and love,  
a people who place their hope in Christ,  
a people united by the Spirit,  
Church of the Lord. »

### **AND YOU, MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS MEMBERS OF INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE, OF SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE, AND OF SECULAR INSTITUTES**

receive this Word as a mark of the work you have done in our midst:

« Happy the person who goes with joy under the yoke of Jesus.  
Happy the one who commits himself or herself to the wishes of God.  
Happy the one who gives the Spirit through the voice of Jesus.  
Paths open in that person's heart,  
and this person will be seated on the throne of the Son.  
In God's paradise, this person will receive the mantle of joy. »

### **AND YOU, MY BROTHER PRIESTS,**

you who are my primary collaborators, in all fraternity and solidarity I repeat to you the words of Peter:

« Tend the flock of God that is in your charge,  
exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly,  
as God would have you do it - not for sordid gain but eagerly. »

### **AN URGENT APPEAL TO PEOPLE OF GOOD WILL**

Through these words stressing the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Church of the Edmundston Diocese, I also want to address all persons of good will who live in Madawaska, Victoria, and Restigouche Counties. In a first pastoral letter published last May 21, I noted that each one of the 60,000 persons living in this territory were of major importance. You are special. You are the Father's well-beloved children. The Church of the Edmundston Diocese needs each and everyone of you to proclaim the Good News of Jesus, to welcome the Kingdom of God among us, and to live it out on a daily basis in our own surroundings. The Church of the Edmundston Diocese needs you to continue building up a kingdom of justice and truth, a kingdom of life and of peace, a kingdom of tenderness, mercy, and holiness in the midst of the social, cultural,

economic and political realities of our milieu. I hope that you will receive in your lives the most beautiful gift the Lord could make to humankind: the gift of himself, the gift of his Gospel, the gift of his Church.

If the Church of the Edmundston Diocese could be faulted, in situations of discord or indifference to the message of Jesus, I humbly beg God's forgiveness as well as yours, my brothers and sisters who have felt yourselves sinned against by members of our Church. And as far as I am concerned, I am ready to forgive the offenses which the Catholic Church may have been the object, as well as forget the sorrow felt in times of discord or separations; because traditionally, a jubilee or holy year is always accompanied with forgiveness and reconciliation. I hope that within families and parishes, such a reconciliation be made with generosity and goodness. May the prayer of Jesus guide our conduct: « Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. » May those who have felt unjustly pushed aside, marginalised, accused, or even rejected by words or gestures on the part of members of the Edmundston Diocesan Church, implore God's mercy and forgiveness. Let misunderstandings, suspicions, and maliciousness cease that could exist regarding unfortunate words or gestures. In the example of God the Father who lets His light shine on the just and the unjust, may our goodness and kindness, our welcome of others and our charity surpass everything that could have militated against them. « Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. »

The Edmundston Diocesan Church needs you all to proclaim and share daily the Gospel of Jesus which we have received as an inheritance. Receive this Word of God as the Light which guides our daily steps. Within your own families, may this Word be truly a welcoming of the very person of Jesus who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. The Church of Jesus manifests its life first of all by the decided actions of a local grouping of persons: wherever two or three are gathered in Jesus' name to listen to his Gospel and celebrate the Eucharist.

The Edmundston Diocesan Church needs all of you to witness daily to the extraordinary hope that Jesus has deposited in us by his triumph over death, and by his resurrection. Whether it be with the sick or the dying, or with those who question the meaning of life or the after-life, Christians must bear witness to this hope before the whole world. Allow me to state once again that the Sunday gathering is one of the major vehicles of such a proclamation: every time we gather together we proclaim the return of the Lord. Let me also point out that the celebration of Mass is the centre of the whole Christian life, for the local and universal Church and for all the faithful. [The Eucharist] is the summit of the action through which God in Christ sanctifies the world, and as the apex of the worship that men and women offer to the Father, by worshipping Him through the mediation of Christ. All this points to the necessity for all baptised to gather together for fellowship, listening to the Word, celebrating the Eucharist, and to better serve the world. It also points to the responsibility which is ours, to make these gatherings more meaningful and nourishing. The Lord is always there, inviting us to grow together in this mystery of faith, hope, and love.

More than ever, the Edmundston Diocesan Church needs each and everyone of you for fraternal and missionary renewal in the midst of daily life. Within this country, the Edmundston Diocesan Church must continue to fully experience the marvel of faith; it must also continue making disciples for Jesus, and allow thousands of people to live more deeply in the manner of Jesus, under the guidance of the Spirit.

#### **LOVE WILL CONTINUE TO BE MANIFESTED**

As baptised and confirmed children of God, filled with thanksgiving for the years gone by, proud of our ancestors, and happy to live the present moment, let us set out for the future in hope, along this jubilee path. Tomorrow again the love of God will be on all our brothers and sisters. This love will spread through these acts of love we perform each day, through the weeks and years; it will spread through gestures of mutual help and solidarity, through words of peace and tenderness, and through daring initiatives of peace and reconciliation. If our families and work recreation places are as many places of kindness and love, the Edmundston Diocesan Church will continue to be a haven of peace and of future growth. May the Virgin Mary, the Immaculate Conception, and her divine Son Jesus fill us with countless blessings!

A Happy, Holy Year!

*+ François Thibodeau ym*

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