
« KEEP ALIVE THE MEMORY OF THE LORD »



- I - THE MEMORY OF THE CHURCH
- II - WE ARE THE PEOPLE OF GOD
- III - WE ARE A PRIESTLY PEOPLE
- IV - WE ARE A PROPHETIC PEOPLE
- V - WE ARE A ROYAL PEOPLE
- VI - DO THIS IN MEMORY OF ME

25 May 1996
Pentecost Sunday

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This injunction we find in the Liturgy of the Hours is a permanent invitation to the Church as a whole, hence to every baptised person, to remember the attitudes, words and gestures of Jesus. However, this injunction cannot be kept without the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. This is why, in this third pastoral letter on the occasion of the feast of Pentecost after having written on the theme of human dignity and the holiness of God, and on the importance for the Christian community to care for each of its members it is not without trepidation that I want to briefly recall the marvels that the Holy Spirit is working in our world; but I do so all the more willingly on this day when, through the action of the Holy Spirit, Deacon Curtis Sappier becomes the first Maliseet priest of the Lord. I also do it because of the five diocesan eucharistic congresses preparatory to the Jubilee of the year 2000. It is by referring almost exclusively to the conciliar and liturgical teachings especially the eucharistic prayers that I want to point out this marvellous activity of the Holy Spirit. « At the last supper as he sat at table with his disciples, he offered himself to you as the spotless lamb, the acceptable gift that gave the Father perfect praise. Christ has given us this memorial of his passion to bring us its saving power until the end of time. When the faithful receive this great sacrament, the Holy Spirit nourishes them and confirms them in holiness, so that the family of humankind might walk in the light of one faith, in one communion of love. We come then to this wonderful sacrament to become filled with grace and have a foretaste of the Kingdom. »

THE MEMORY OF THE CHURCH

It would not be possible to remember Jesus without the presence of the Holy Spirit who is there to remind us of all that Jesus said. For close to two thousand years, the Spirit of Jesus has been the memory of the Church. Had not Jesus proclaimed, « The Paraclete, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will instruct you in everything, and remind you of all that I told you » ? It is still the same Spirit today who makes us remember Jesus. It is this Spirit who inspired the first Christian communities to live in the manner of the Risen One and to pass on to generations to come all that they had learned from Jesus. It is the Spirit, the gift of God, who worked in a very special way with the evangelists to pass on to us an account of the events that took place among the first disciples. It isn't for nothing that the Church acclaims Jesus as follows: « Blessed be Jesus, sent by the Father to be the friend of children and of the poor; he promised to send the Holy Spirit to be with us each day, so that we might live for him. » And he has kept his word.

WE ARE THE PEOPLE OF GOD

« God did not want to save only individuals who had no relations with one another; rather, He wanted to make of them a people that would truly know Him and serve Him in holiness. » We bear the glorious names of holy nation, redeemed people, chosen race, royal priesthood; we are God's people; we are charged today with proclaiming the marvels of the one who has called us to His glorious light. What took place, for things to happen this way ?

- A People That Benefits from God's Mercy

In the first letter of Peter we are told that at one time we were not a people and that we lived in darkness, that at one time we had not received mercy but that now this mercy has been granted to us. Once we were not a people, but we are one, now. We have benefited from the freely given mercy of God obtained for us through the work of Jesus empowered by the Holy Spirit. « Rejoice, choirs of angels! Break out in rejoicing throughout the world. Let the joy of the sons and daughters of God break out in the Church! here for all time is the one Passover, the long march to the land of freedom; in the night your people marches on, free and victorious! Here is the victory, here is freedom for all people, the risen Christ triumphs over death! » This is the remarkable reality we are now living. And referring to the prayer that follows baptism, we can assert that we are his people through baptism, we are anointed with the holy oil so that we can eternally remain members of Jesus Christ the priest, prophet, and king.

- A People That Recognises the Mercy of God

Those whom the Father draws to Him in His great mercy form the people of God, the temple of the Holy Spirit, the body of Christ in which all divisions are abolished. The Spirit works among men and women so that all may be one. Enemies are being reconciled; those who are estranged join hands in friendship, and nations seek together the way of peace. We constantly recognise the mercy of our God, His faithfulness, goodness, and love that come to our aid. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, God's forgiveness is given in abundance to us sinners. And it is thanks to Him that we can in turn forgive our brothers and sisters. It is thanks to Him that as we are reconciled to God and our neighbours, we can offer a worthy sacrifice marked by mercy. It is now that the people of God knows a period of grace and reconciliation, when the Father allows His people in Christ to catch their breath by turning to Him and by being of service to their neighbour, thus surrendering all the more to the Holy Spirit.

WE ARE A PRIESTLY PEOPLE

« The liturgy is the summit towards which the Church's action is directed; it is also the source whence all its power comes. »

In joining the people of God through faith and baptism, the baptised person is given a share in the people's unique vocation: its priestly vocation. Christ Jesus, the high priest chosen from among humankind, has made of the new people a kingdom of priests. Through regeneration and anointing of the Holy Spirit, the baptised are consecrated to become a spiritual home and a holy priesthood. All we have received, all that exists in the universe we can offer to God as an acceptable sacrifice; we want that through the Holy Spirit our sacrifice of praise rise like incense before the Father. We acknowledge that no one could pray or even pronounce the name of Jesus without inspiration from the Holy Spirit who prompts us to cry out to God by calling Him « Father. »

- A Thanks-Giving People

Since the beginning of the world love and life have never ceased uniting and nourishing one another at the fountain of the Holy Spirit. According to God's will and in the power of this same Holy Spirit, Jesus, through his death, brought life to the world. And so it is fitting that we always recall the work of the Trinity: «The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,» and that we loudly proclaim our gratitude and joy. In remembering Jesus we recall how, led by the Holy Spirit, he never stopped giving thanks to his Father for all that he saw and heard. He said to his disciples: «Blest are the eyes that see what you see; blest are the ears that hear what you hear.» Filled with gratitude, we too want to bless our God because the Almighty continues to work His marvellous deeds. And like Mary inspired by the Holy Spirit, we cry out, « His love is from age to age. » Not only must we be a people in friendship with God, a people in a state of grace: we must equally be a thanks-giving people. May our assemblies be harmonised with these praises that come from a grateful heart. Inspired by the Spirit, may we proclaim in our songs and hymns all those good, great, and holy things which the Lord has worked among his people.

- A People Called to Holiness

We are a people called to holiness, to the greatest intimacy possible. Every eucharistic celebration gradually leads us to Jesus' great self-offering to his Father: this is the summit of every eucharist, what we call the doxology. All of Christian praise is summed up in a very compact formula, a trinitarian formula to which the entire assembly is joined as it cries out: AMEN! It is through Jesus, with him, and in him that all honour and glory are given to God the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit for ever and ever. A height without compare where the divine encounters the human; an incomparable encounter surpassing even that of Sinai or the burning bush. At the conclusion of every remembrance of the death, resurrection, and return of Jesus, all of humankind - that of yesterday, today, and tomorrow - intimately united to the thrice-holy God in a new and everlasting covenant, is sealed in the blood of Jesus poured out for all. This great work is there before our eyes; the mystery of faith is truly great. It is thanks to the Holy Spirit that everything happens in this way. Chosen to serve in the presence of God, we are gathered together by the Holy Spirit into the one body of Christ.

WE ARE A PROPHETIC PEOPLE

« The Church founded by Christ is nourished by the Spirit. Sprung from the pierced heart of Christ, it is a visible sign to the world, on Pentecost. »

The holy people of God shares in Christ's prophetic function. His holy people is prophetic especially through the supernatural sense of faith which is the faith of the entire people when it binds itself to the faith that has been passed on, deepens its understanding of it, and witnesses to it in the midst of the world. As members of the people of God, we are nourished by the bread of prayer, the bread of the Word. We come to this Word of Life to welcome it into the deepest part of our beings and we actualise it on behalf of the world thanks to this abiding presence of the Spirit. This Word becomes prayer and witness. We pray for all humankind, we pray for all our brothers and sisters, especially those who suffer the most. We pray for the living and the dead. Nourished in this way, we are then ready to witness and act in the name of Jesus.

- A People of the Word

In the very first pages of the Bible, in the first creation account we are told that the Spirit of God hovered over the waters while the Word of God was creating all things. He spoke, and it was done. This same creative Word is alive: it continues its work down the centuries. It accompanies the people of God throughout the people's long history. This Word became flesh, and dwelt among us. « This is what we proclaim to you: what was from

the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked upon and our hands have touched - we speak of the word of life. This life became visible; we have seen and bear witness to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life that was present to the Father and became visible to us. » We sometimes hear the expression « the People of the Word, » so much are Word and People so intimately joined. We would have no existence without the creative Word, neither as individuals nor as a people. Thanks to the Spirit, we are privileged to still be in contact with this Word and to witness to this Voice that was proclaimed both in the desert of Sinai and at the Jordan: « This is my beloved Son. My favor rests on him. » We are convened by the Word of life; we are sealed with the Word of God. Thanks to the Holy Spirit, the Word is a living and inexhaustible treasure, a spring of living water from which we are invited to drink. To ignore the Word is to ignore Christ himself. To welcome and proclaim the Word is to welcome and proclaim Christ himself. Through the work of the Holy Spirit a marvellous exchange takes place in Jesus: When Jesus takes on himself the human condition, human nature takes on a unique dignity. Jesus becomes one of us to such a degree that we become eternal. Wonderful Word, wonderful Spirit! When Christ the Word of God makes himself known to us mortals, the Father regenerates us through the eternal light of His divinity. How important it is to welcome the Word of God at the deepest core of one's being. It is a precious heritage of which the Church is trustee; it places this wonderful Word at the service of the People of God to guide and heal, to nourish and strengthen. We therefore readily understand the importance of the word of the person who is nourished on the Word: it must be true in all things.

- A Witnessing People

One of the preferred ways of the Church, the People of God, to witness to the presence and action of God in the world is to give thanks. The Church never stops giving thanks; it shows its gratitude at all times and in all places; it does so in a very particular way at the ordination of a bishop or priest: « By your Holy Spirit, » the Church states, « you [the Father] anointed your only Son High Priest of the new and eternal covenant. With wisdom and love you have planned that this priesthood should continue in the Church. Christ gives the dignity of the royal priesthood to the people he has made his own. From these, with a brother's love, he chooses men to share his sacred ministry by the laying on of hands. He appoints them to renew in his name the sacrifice of our redemption as they set before your family his paschal meal. He calls them to lead your people in love, nourish them by your word, and strengthen them through the sacraments. They are to give their lives in your service and for the salvation of your people as they strive to grow in the likeness of Christ and honor you by their courageous witness of faith and love.» Bishops and priests who preside the eucharistic gatherings have been sealed with the Holy Spirit. As special witnesses, faithful to prayer and the service of the Word, they never cease blessing the Lord and gathering His people. A special power coming from God has been given to those whom the Lord has chosen; it is the Spirit who forms the leaders, the Spirit whom the Father gave to Jesus Christ His beloved Son.

WE ARE A ROYAL PEOPLE

« The Lord also desires to extend his Kingdom, a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love, and peace. »

The people of God share in Christ's royal function. Christ exercises his kingship by making himself the servant of all, since he did not come to be served but to serve and give his life as ransom for many. To reign is to serve, especially the poor and the suffering. The world opens to life, man and woman receive the Spirit. The breath of the Most High raises up a new people from all races, languages and frontiers, to make of them the body of Jesus Christ and renew the face of the earth.

- People of Service

The Father wants to fill us with the Holy Spirit and make us into one body and one spirit in Christ. For this, we must be attentive to our commitment and open new avenues for Christ Jesus in the social, economic, cultural, and political arenas. And that we might live no longer for ourselves but for him who died and rose for us, Jesus sends the Holy Spirit from the Father as his first gift to those who believe, to carry on his work on earth and to bring us to the fullness of grace. The Spirit who anointed the Servant Jesus to proclaim the Good News to the poor is then given to us so that we, too, may share, according to God's mysterious design, the same mission with our brothers and sisters, namely, that of bringing them the joyful news, the news that is good for them. We who partake in the Body and Blood of Christ in the joy of the Holy Spirit beg God that this communion enable us to witness to Jesus, to live like Jesus, totally committed to him and to everyone, and this, along the paths of truth and unity. We instantly pray that He make of His Church in the world the visible sign of unity and the servant of peace. We beg Him to give His Holy Spirit of love to those who share in the eucharistic meal: « Father of love, give us the Spirit of love, the Spirit of your Son. Open our eyes to the pain of others, inspire us with the appropriate word when we come face to face with lonely and helpless brothers and sisters. Give us the courage to act when our brothers and sisters are deprived and oppressed. May your Church be a place of truth and freedom, of justice and peace, so that every man and woman may find more reason to hope. »

- A People Drawn to Unity

« Grant that your Church become, in the midst of a divided world, an instrument of service for unity, so that in our country, the Church may find new vitality and strengthen the bond of unity that exists between priests and their bishops, and between all bishops and the pope. » This is one of the petitions we make in order to become more and more a people constantly directed towards the unity willed by Jesus. Unity within our humanness is one of the greatest services the people of God can render to our brothers and sisters, today. The task of gathering together started long ago: to form one body, a people with one heart and one soul. It is the Father who gives life, who sanctifies all things through Jesus Christ our Lord, with the working of the Holy Spirit; He does not cease gathering a people to Himself so that throughout the world a perfect offering may be made to Him. It is deliberately that we respond to this great gathering movement.

We were dispersed; by the gift of his life, Jesus desires to gather together at his kingdom table men and women from every nation and language, from every race and culture. Thanks to the Spirit, one day we shall be able to celebrate the unity finally achieved and the peace conclusively obtained. At every eucharist, we humbly ask that through sharing in the body and blood of Christ we may be truly brought together into one body by the Holy Spirit. It is not easy to form a people: all of sacred history testifies to the fact of the incessant wanderings and recriminations of God's people. There is one God, one faith, one Spirit, but how hard it is to form one people!

As Jesus at the Last Supper prayed at length for the Father to be glorified and that we be one with him and his Father, so do we also pray this same Father at every celebration, to give us in this eucharistic meal His Holy Spirit so that He may destroy the causes of our divisions and establish us in a greater charity.

WE ARE A PEOPLE MOVED BY THE SPIRIT

« Since we live by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's lead. »

Jesus' first disciples went to the temple together every day. They did this first and foremost to keep memory of Jesus and repeat his actions. In so doing they discovered themselves to be more and more brothers and sisters in Christ, through the Spirit. St. Paul's long account of the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians reminds us

of this essential unity. It is truly a grace to experience fellowship. Regular gatherings help us discover the bonds that unite us to one another. Even today it is through constant attendance that bonds are created and anonymity disappears, whether among friends or teammates.

- A People Transformed by the Spirit

The recent liturgical reform brought out the constantly wonderful work of the Spirit in the midst of our world, in the Church, at every Eucharist. Just as the Spirit was present at the time Mary was told that she would conceive and give birth to a son who was to be called Jesus, so is this same Spirit at each of our eucharistic celebrations. It is through and in the power of the Spirit that the bread and wine become for us the body and blood of Christ. The diverse prayers, the invocations made before the account of the Institution which we call the « epiclesis » speak to us of this active presence: « Let your Spirit accomplish his work; let these offerings become for us the Body and Blood of your beloved Son Jesus Christ, in whom we are your children. Send your Spirit upon this bread so that Jesus may accomplish among us the presence of his body and blood. » « Let your Spirit come upon these gifts to make them holy, so that they may become for us the body and blood of our Lord, Jesus Christ. » « We pray to you, Father, to sanctify these offerings by the power of your Spirit, as we carry out what he has asked us to do. »

- A People in Deep Communion

We shall never finish deepening the great mystery of baptism, of the eucharist, and of the other sacraments. I hope, however, that we truly help one another live our baptism and come to a better understanding of the Eucharist we celebrate week after week, if not day after day. May the eucharistic celebration never become something routine, trivial, or ordinary. Saint John Eudes went so far as to declare that it would take an eternity to prepare ourselves to celebrate one mass, another eternity to celebrate it well, and yet another to give thanks. We are a long way from a speed contest, here! I truly believe that we must constantly relearn to celebrate the Eucharist, because what is ordinary can become trivial and make us forget what is extraordinary. At a priest's ordination, the bishop says: « Accept from the holy people of God the gifts to be offered to him. Know what you are doing, and imitate the mystery you celebrate: model your life on the mystery of the Lord's cross. » These instructions are always timely, and they are demanding. I am certain of this: We could make a better understanding of the Eucharist a pastoral priority through community reflection founded on an appropriate, dynamic, and dynamic catechesis. This would be one way of implementing the statute I published November 10, 1995, on revaluing our Sunday gatherings. If only we had a better understanding of the greatness of the eucharistic celebration, we could make of it a weekly celebration of the greatest significance to the entire community. There is a great challenge, here, not only for liturgy committees but also for the parish and our diocesan Church as a whole. The Holy Spirit who is the memory of Jesus will help us remember Him once again in order to better praise and constantly bless him and ready ourselves for his coming again.

DO THIS IN MEMORY OF ME

« Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes! »

We are the chosen people, a priestly and royal people, a people moved by the Spirit. I call on the pastors, pastoral agents, religious, catechists, and parents to pursue their reflection on these profound realities. I have only recalled them briefly, here. I hope that our five diocesan eucharistic congresses will help us recognise these marvels of God. I conclude this pastoral letter very simply with the prayer preparatory to the First Diocesan Eucharistic Congress which will take place June 7, 8, and 9, and whose main theme is DO THIS IN MEMORY OF ME!

« Father, we acknowledge that your love is from age to age. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, your Son Jesus offered himself for us, and he continues to give himself to us in the sacrament of the Eucharist. As we approach the jubilee Year 2000, help us keep the memorial of Jesus at the heart of our lives. May our Sunday gatherings be the source and the summit of our Christian lives as we recall the death and resurrection of Jesus and wait for his coming again in glory. We ask this and we thank you our God who is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Amen. »

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