
« EYES FIXED ON JESUS KEEP »



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23 May 1999
Pentecost Sunday

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

For the sixth consecutive year I am addressing you a pastoral letter for the feast of Pentecost, and this time I would like to examine with you the paths to the future which are now opening to us to help us carry out in the midst of the world the mission of Jesus. However, permit me in this year consecrated to God the Father, to recall the exhortation of Saint John Eudes who urges us to lift up our hearts to God in this way, at baptism, confirmation, and ordination:

- Exhortation

« Let us adore the Father who sends His Son into the world, and Jesus Christ who sends his Apostles as the Father has sent him. Let us give thanks to our Saviour for coming among us, for giving us his Church, and for giving us a share in his mission. Let us ask his forgiveness for having neglected our mission, for having acted by ourselves and not as his messengers. Let us dedicate ourselves to him so that he may fill us with his missionary Spirit which is always at work in his Church. »

LET US EARNESTLY PURSUE THE MISSION OF JESUS

Before disappearing from the sight of his apostles, Jesus gave them a beautiful and challenging mission: « All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have taught you. And remember that I am with you always, until the end of time. »

- A Mission That Is Beginning

In one of the most beautiful encyclicals he has written, Pope John Paul II affirms: « The mission of Christ the Redeemer, which is entrusted to the Church, is still very far from completion. As the second Millennium after

Christ's coming comes to an end, an overall view of the human race shows that this mission is still only beginning and that we must commit ourselves wholeheartedly to its service. It is the Spirit who impels us to proclaim the great works of God. »

- A New Missionary Era

On this day feast of Pentecost, 1999, let us welcome the Holy Spirit in us and in the midst of our community in order to proclaim with the Apostles God's wondrous works. Let us gratefully and trustingly welcome these words of the Holy Father: « Today, as never before, the Church has the opportunity of bringing the Gospel, by witness and word, to all people and nations. I see the dawning of a new missionary age, which will become a radiant day bearing an abundant harvest, if all Christians [...] respond with generosity and holiness to the calls and challenges of our time. Like the Apostles after Christ's Ascension, the Church must gather in the Upper Room 'together with Mary the Mother of Jesus' (Ac. 1:14), in order to pray for the Spirit and to gain strength and courage to carry out the missionary mandate. We too, like the Apostles, need to be transformed and guided by the Spirit. On the eve of the third Millennium the whole Church is invited to live more intensely the mystery of Christ. »

- A New Springtime

Missionary vitality has always been a sign of the Church's vitality. Vatican Council II, and closer to us, the Edmundston Diocesan Synod (1987-1990), and the vast pastoral restructuring operation taking place have had but one object: to focus our attention on the mission of Christ, to discover and rediscover the mission wind which blew over the populace, that first Pentecost, and which continues its work in this new springtime of the Church.

- To Proclaim Jesus

Pope John Paul still urges Christians to be concerned for the billions who do not yet know Jesus as Saviour of the world. The missionary motivation belongs to the very nature of Christian life. Even newly-evangelised Churches become evangelisers in turn, showing in this way that we cannot tell others what we have not heard about the Risen Jesus. I rejoice in the fact that over thirty of our own people are in foreign lands proclaiming the Good News of Jesus: may they inspire our own witnessing to Jesus in the midst of our local communities. The mission must be lived both here and elsewhere; a daunting and demanding task awaits us in our own communities, to proclaim Jesus and his Message of Life.

- Presence of the Risen One

The mission to evangelise which the Risen Lord gave to his Church is followed by confidence based on his promise to continue to abide and act among us. This mysterious presence of Christ in his Church is its guarantee of success in carrying out its task. Throughout the Apostolic Exhortation he addressed to the faithful of America, at Mexico City on January 22 of this year, Pope John Paul invites us to a new evangelisation of the world, an evangelisation that is « new in its ardor, methods, and expression. »

- A Mission That Is Always New

The greatest importance must be given to parish-bound religious education; special attention must be given to the poor, the sick, the young and the elderly. Special attention also must be given to families in our milieu, especially those families with serious problems. These and similar hopes were expressed to me by people

throughout the diocese. This establishes our mission in concrete terms, the mission we have to remind others of God's love, build up the Body of Christ, proclaim the Risen Jesus Christ, and work at building up the Kingdom of God which Jesus inaugurated.

LET US WELCOME AND KNOW JESUS

Through our parents, godparents, and the entire Church, at baptism we welcomed Jesus in our lives; rather, it would be better to say that it was Jesus himself who welcomed us as members of his own body. At our baptism we were reborn to a new life, the life of Jesus, and we were made members of the Church. Day after day we must remember what we have become through the grace of God. « Christian, be aware of your dignity, » insisted Pope St. Leo the Great. Day after day we must discover more and more who Jesus is and what is the main message he has brought us.

- Master of Humankind

The profession of faith made before tens of thousands of Filipinos, at Manila in 1970 by Pope Paul VI, is to me most refreshing and uplifting. He declared: « Jesus is Christ, the Son of the living God. Because of him we come to know the God we cannot see. He is the firstborn of all creation; in him all things find their being. Man's teacher and redeemer, he was born for us, died for us, and for us he rose from the dead. All things, all history converges in Christ. A man of sorrow and hope, he knows us and loves us. As our friend he stays by us throughout our lives; at the end of time he will come to be our judge; but we also know that he will be the complete fulfilment of our lives and our great happiness for all eternity. »

- Our Brother

Pope Paul continues: « I can never cease to speak of Christ for he is our truth and our light: he is the way, the truth, and the life. He is our bread, our source of living water who allays our hunger and satisfies our thirst. He is our shepherd, our leader, our ideal, our comforter and our brother. He is like us but more perfectly human, simple, poor, humble, and yet, while burdened with work, he is more patient. He spoke on our behalf; he worked miracles; and he founded a new kingdom: in it the poor are happy; peace is the foundation of a life in common; where the pure of heart and those who mourn are uplifted and comforted; the hungry find justice; sinners are forgiven; and all discover they are brothers. » He ended his profession of faith by proclaiming: « The image I present to you is the image of Jesus Christ... So once again I repeat his name to you Christians and I proclaim to all men: Jesus Christ is the beginning and the end, the alpha and the omega, Lord of the new universe, the great hidden key to human history and the part we play in it. He is the mediator - the bridge, if you will - between heaven and earth. Above all he is the Son of man, more perfect than any man, being also the Son of God, eternal and infinite. He is the son of Mary his mother on earth, more blessed than any woman. She is also our mother in the spiritual communion of the mystical body. Remember: It is Jesus Christ I preach day in and day out. His name I would see echo and reecho for all time even to the ends of the earth. »

- The Misunderstood Christ

Is Jesus Christ for most of us « the goal of human history, the focal point of the desires of history and civilization, the center of humanity, the joy of all hearts, and the fulfilment of all aspirations, » as the Fathers of Vatican II described him ? Despite the incalculable number of books and magazines on Jesus, despite the countless thousands of sermons preached and religion classes given, despite the saints and the martyrs, Jesus is not yet known by everyone. Despite our saying « Year 2000 » as a reference to the birth of Jesus the Messiah, the Son of the living God still goes unrecognised.

- Misunderstood in Our Milieus

We do not have to go far to confirm this. In our own milieus we do not always find a lively faith in Christ Jesus, true God and true man. Without always being aware of it, we live in an ever increasing secular society, with no major reference to religion. While in the not-too-distant past we could pray to and talk of God both at home and in school, this is not always the case, today. Parents and grandparents dare no longer speak of Jesus or call to prayer. [In schools where religious education is part of the curriculum,] the time allotted has been so reduced year after year that there is very little talk of Jesus, any more. And when 60% and more of our Christian population no longer attend church regularly for the Sunday gathering, it is not surprising that Jesus and his message are misunderstood.

- Passing On Our Heritage

It is not my intention to accuse or blame anyone for this new reality in our milieus; I am only trying to explain to myself this misunderstanding of our faith, this ignorance of Jesus. During my pastoral visits I met many 10-year olds who knew neither the prayer of Jesus nor the sign of the cross. How then can one live of the life of Jesus and according to his teaching ? Isn't the mission we received at baptism and confirmation to pass on what we have received, « by teaching them to observe everything that the Lord has commanded » and by realising that he is always there with us? The phenomenon of secularisation brings home to us that the Gospel proclamation is not reserved for foreign countries. Today, in our own homes, around the table, the believing brother can meet an unbelieving brother; in school, the young Christian can meet schoolmates who are curious about his being baptised and his sharing in the life of the Church; in the workplace, the Christian can be differentiated from others by his or her way of being and acting.

TEACH US TO BE « CHURCH »

It is an extraordinary grace to discover Jesus and his life-giving message. It is as great a grace for us as it was for the woman at the well when Jesus met her: « If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him and he would have given you living water. » I pray that each and everyone of you have such an experience, that you, too, encounter Jesus, the Son of the Living God. It will be an overwhelming experience which will affect your entire life. Thanks to the Holy Spirit, you will be confirmed in your faith and you will be able to tell those around you: « It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have seen for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world. »

- An Encounter that Affects Us

This experience of Jesus the Saviour is a determining one for each person and for the Church as a whole. Pope John Paul II's exhortation to the faithful gathered at Mexico City on January 22, 1999, primarily considers this encounter with the Living Christ who is the way of conversion, communion, and solidarity. The Church is the assembly of those who have had this Jesus experience, of those who have met him, who believe in him, hope in him and live in his love. It is much more than an emotional experience: it is an experience of faith and in faith. Baptised in the faith of the Church, in the faith of our parents, we gradually discover a Jesus who shows himself to our hearts. Formed in the life of Jesus, we are called to see with his eyes and listen with his ears, to love, pray, and forgive like him.

- Assembly

It was the Lord who first gathered his people together, who gathered all his dispersed children. The communal and community response to this initiative is called **Church**. « Where two or three are gathered in my name,

I am there among them. » It is the beginning of a Church. The Church is the assembly of Christ's faithful. It is an important and life-giving gathering. To abandon the assembly, to leave the Church, to cut oneself off from one's believing brothers and sisters is a serious step whose consequences we have not fully measured. No longer voluntarily joining one's brothers and sisters for the gathering and for committing oneself to the community brings about emptiness in one's life. If there are no longer any real and regular contacts with one's brothers and sisters in the faith, what kind of Church life is there ? In a family, it would be impossible to talk of quality of family life if there were no vital bonds between the members of that family. It is the same thing with the Church. The Sunday gathering is as vital to the Church as it is to each and every Christian. We could even say that without the Sunday gathering there is no Church.

- Church As Sacrament

« God has gathered all those who in faith look towards Jesus the author of salvation and the source of unity and peace. God has gathered them together and established them as church, that it may be for each and everyone the visible sacrament of this saving unity. » This is the teaching of Vatican Council II. The simple fact of gathering together is a sign to the world of God's love. The church building is a sign of our gathering as Church; it is a reminder that we need to gather together. In His love for His people, God has chosen to make His dwelling place in our places of worship. He desires that we ourselves become temples of the Spirit, radiant in holiness. But if the church building is no longer a gathering place, what significance can it have, today ? It is not nostalgia but a deep conviction that makes me often bring up this topic of the Sunday gathering: it can still form our Christian communities just as it did when the Church was first established in our milieus.

- Gathering-Commitment

Gathering together will lead us to a greater commitment in the name of our faith. More than ever, and especially at the dawn of the new millennium, we must be to our brothers and sisters living signs of the divine love in the different areas of human endeavour: family life, economy, politics, culture, development, education. « Open wide the doors to Christ Jesus! » To be bearers of hope in our respective milieus, it is absolutely necessary to be 'plugged in' to both Christ and our brothers and sisters. We must live as a Church, pray and act as a Church. It seems to me that in order to sustain this hope of new life in the Risen Jesus, we must develop it in prayer and contemplation, as well as in our knowledge of the faith and in commitment to the Church.

LET US TAKE ASSURED PATHS

As we come to the end of a long process of consultation and reflection on the future of our Church, I want to once again express my deepest gratitude to all those who searched for the most appropriate ways to carry on among us the mission of Jesus in the midst of the world. I therefore want to publish here a number of decisions which seem to be most important for our diocesan Church. After having reviewed the recommendations made to the Edmundston Diocesan Synod, in 1995 I made public three main paths to ensure Church growth. The first dealt with the Sunday gathering, the second, with the setting up of parish pastoral councils, and the third, with the formation of parish economic affairs committees. These three paths are closely intertwined. They are necessary to our life as community. I am pleased at the reception given to these directions throughout the diocese, and am happy to note the good results which have already been achieved. We must remain ever vigilant in ensuring that these directions continue to produce the results anticipated.

- First Path: The Sunday Gathering

Sunday must not be like any other day, it should be a holiday and a day of renewal, of gathering together, and of sharing, a day of growth in faith and hope. Let us not splinter our communities by multiplying the number of celebrations. Let us not abandon the Sunday gathering: it is the weekly get-together of the brothers and sisters of Jesus. There are some baptised people who have abandoned the Sunday practice for any number of reasons. I invite them to honestly reconsider their decision for doing so. Perhaps the best gift for the year 2000 could be a return to those enduring values which have left their mark in the world. Our forefathers and foremothers were believers who took time to gather together for prayer, despite the difficult situations of their time.

- Second Path: Parish Pastoral Councils

I insist that parish pastoral councils continue the work they have so well begun. The PPC is a listening post and a means of coordination, one of the most important service components of the community. It is a vital organ to watch over the four great dimensions of the Christian life: it ensures that religious education is dispensed to children, youth, and adults; that the community lives in an atmosphere of fellowship and communion; that celebrations and prayers are given all the importance they deserve; and that no one in the community is left aside or forgotten. Parish pastoral councils are like the ears and mouth of the community: they listen to the needs of their brothers and sisters and point them in the right direction.

- Third Path: Parish Economic Affairs Committees

I equally insist that the parish economic affairs committees continue the work they have so ably begun. More than three hundred people are now involved in overseeing what belongs to our communities. What I find admirable are these committees that act as a community in managing the Church's goods, with one person looking after the parish buildings and property, while another looks after the management and upkeep of the cemetery. After this three-year trial period, we note that the parish economic affairs committees can accomplish much to alleviate the workload of those in charge of the pastoral ministry, especially the priests. The more densely populated parishes could appoint a manager who, in close collaboration with the pastor and the parish economic affairs committee, would look after everything that concerns parish finances, hiring and jobs, buildings and property. Since according to Canon Law the pastor must see to the administration of the goods of the parish, this role of oversight could be carried out by periodic meetings of the parish manager with the pastor.

- Fourth Path: The Parish Pastoral Ministry Team

After having advised those in charge of parishes, the parish pastoral council and parish economic affairs committee chairpersons, I now advise everyone in the diocese of a major direction for our Diocese: the formation of parish pastoral teams to minister to one or more Christian communities. These teams, composed of between three and five persons mandated by the bishop for a specific term, are at the service of the mission of the Church of Christ, and work for the renewal of the parish through development and promotion of religious education, concern for the poor, and the community's celebrations and prayer life. Responsibility for the parish can no longer rest on the shoulders of one person alone.

I shall be very attentive to the application of this diocesan regulation, during this year and in years to come. The pastoral ministry team mandated by the bishop ensures that no aspect of the Christian life is forgotten: faith education, celebration of the sacraments, fraternal communion, and transformation of one's milieu. The team members must be recognised in their community for their love of Christ and his Church; they must be able to work as a team, be interested in the religious development of their milieu, and be concerned with their

parish's actual situation regarding religious education, celebrations, concern for the poor, and a sense of prayer.

- Fifth Path: The Priest's Task is Recentered on Essentials

« Faced with a shortage of priests, it is important that these be freed more and more from administrative tasks and that members of economic affairs committees take on their own responsibilities. Priests must find time to pray and celebrate, to look after the spiritual training of their team, and to ensure the spiritual formation of committee members, to renew and upgrade themselves, and rest. Priests must also visit the sick and the poor in their milieus; they must proclaim the Gospel in every way, but especially through their homilies and religious education. » These recommendations of the Diocesan Pastoral Council are most important not only to the priests but also for the life of Christian communities.

If in each parish there is a parish pastoral council, a parish economic affairs committee and a parish pastoral team all working together in solidarity for the welfare and the future of the community, great strides will have been made along the road of our pastoral restructuring. The future of our parishes will no longer depend on one person only but on an impressive number of baptised, confirmed, and ordained persons. We must aim at lightening our structures, but we must also make certain that we have the basic tools needed for the necessary participation of the community. I believe that these are five sure paths to take for the life and future of our communities: the Sunday gathering of all the baptised, the establishment of parish pastoral councils, the formation of parish economic affairs committees, the introduction of parish pastoral teams, and the essential role of the priest. These paths to the future are important steps along the road of collaboration and coresponsibility. They will require a lot of flexibility and dialogue, and much prayer and forgiveness. Nothing is carved in stone; we shall have to start over and over again. We shall have to be faithful to Christ and his Church to the very end. With eyes fixed on Jesus and his mission, moved by the Spirit, we shall not fear to act boldly and employ the surest means to ensure the future of our Christian communities.

LET US JOIN IN GOD'S STRUGGLE

These years we are living mark a turning-point in our properly passing from one year to another, one century to another, one millennium to another. In order to ensure the ongoing life and the very survival of our Christian communities in the Diocese of Edmundston, I advocate five sure but not exclusive paths; in other writings and homilies, I spoke of the importance of priestly vocations, of necessary pastoral training, and of commitment to social justice as the expressions of one's faith. These paths dispense no baptised, confirmed or ordained person from espousing other paths which lead to conversion, communion, and solidarity. They are avenues which allow us to better respond to the Lord's command: « You shall love the Lord with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength, and your neighbour as yourself, » or the command of Jesus: « Love one another as I have loved you. »

- Jubilee 2000

All these paths, passages and ways are as many moments of grace from the Lord to enlist us both personally and as a community for the building up of the kingdom of life and truth, of grace and holiness, of justice, love, and peace. They are grace-filled events which I invite you to experience fully on the occasion of this turning-point in the history of humankind. Last November 27, in officially announcing that the Great Jubilee of the year 2000 would begin on Christmas, 1999 and last until January 6, 2001, Pope John Paul II said: « The Holy Year must be one uninterrupted hymn of praise to the Trinity. May this hymn to the Trinity, praise for the Incarnation of the Son, be sung with one voice by all those who have been baptised and who share in the one faith in Jesus the Lord. »

- Various Paths

Pope John Paul II insists on the importance of prayer during the year: prayer for the universal Church, prayer for the Pope, prayer for pastors, prayer for the faithful, and celebration of the sacraments of reconciliation and of the Eucharist: a vast network of prayer, forgiveness and thanksgiving covering the universe. If the Roman and Holy Land basilicas are important meeting places for these periods of prayer and pilgrimage, Pope John Paul has also decreed that these grace-filled moments of the Jubilee can also be experienced in a special way in every diocese if the faithful go on pilgrimage to the cathedral church or other places designated by the diocesan bishop.

- Designated Churches

In our diocese, the Cathedral at Edmundston is the sign of the unity of our diocesan community and a sign of communion with all other Christian churches in the world. It is a special house of prayer; it is the place of the *cathedra*, the bishop's seat, symbol of his apostolic charge to oversee the prayer, teaching and service of his flock. As in previous years, pastoral activities will be offered at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception throughout the year to remind all of the presence of Jesus among his people. Because of the importance of the Sunday gathering at the heart of the community, I appoint all of our parish churches as places of prayer, reconciliation, and communion throughout this jubilee year: I invite all to come often, at least on a weekly basis, in order to continue building up our Christian communities.

- Debts and Injuries

According to the jubilee tradition, slaves were freed, debts were remitted, and the soil was left fallow, at that time. Because of requests from our milieu and also due to the explicit request of Pope John Paul II, rich countries are asked to remit the debt of poor nations; there are encouraging signs that this will take place. May we too, in answer to the Lord's command in the prayer he has taught us, remit the debt of those who have offended us: « Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." May the year 2000 be a special time of reconciliation and forgiveness in our families and parishes, may we help heal those wounds we have voluntarily or involuntarily caused.

- Compassion and Presence

Besides prayer, pilgrimages, celebrations and reconciliation, the Holy Father reminds us of these graced events which are visits to our needy or distressed brothers and sisters: the sick, prisoners, the elderly and the lonely, the handicapped, and the grieving. These are opportunities for us to discover Christ Jesus present in these people in a very special way. May the values of friendship, mutual help and solidarity which are so well established in our milieu, continue to flourish throughout this period of grace.

- Eucharistic Congresses

I would like to remind you of the principle activity we are promoting, to help us prepare for the Jubilee of the Year 2000: the preparation and celebration of five diocesan Eucharistic Congresses. Our Fourth Eucharistic Congress will soon take place in the Grand Falls Deanery (June 4, 5, 6), and we are already looking forward to the fifth and final congress which is to take place in the Edmundston Deanery, on Pentecost weekend, June 9, 10, and 11 of the year 2000. The Eucharist is the chief sacrament of the presence of Jesus among his people. Bread is broken and wine is poured out for the salvation of our brothers and sisters. Jesus gives up his life so that we may have it to the full. The mystery of our faith is truly great: we recall the death of Jesus, his resurrection, and his return in glory. May the Jubilee be a living source of graces for all humankind. More

than ever, let us welcome Jesus in our hearts, and let us witness daily by our commitment of faith, hope, and charity. If each one in our communities is focused on Jesus and is renewed in the grace of his/her baptism, during the Jubilee year, there is no doubt that our communities as a whole will be more dynamic, fraternal, and mission-oriented.

LET US WALK WITH JESUS

As I bring this letter to a close, I want to address in a special way three groups of people in our diocese: the young, the older people, and families. It seems to me that in the name of Jesus and at the dawn of the year 2000 I can and must call them to a very special mission.

- Young People

« I confidently address myself to you who are so full of strength, daring, and enthusiasm. I was happy to confirm more than 4000 of you, these past five years. I was proud that in this way you showed me and my predecessors your desire to welcome the Holy Spirit and to be witnesses of Jesus in the world. You wanted to live the new life you have received, you wanted to become 'contaminated' with the love of God, you wanted to be bearers of the light of Jesus, and become active and responsible members of a more honest and brotherly world; in other words, you wanted to carry out the mission that Jesus gave you. How much of all this is left, today ? How I wish that these beautiful dispositions of generosity, courage and availability would continue to be with you! You received the gift of wisdom so as to better understand the place of the Lord in your life. You received the gift of understanding in order to see the Word of God as a beacon guiding your path in life. You received the gift of fortitude so as to live and love as Jesus did, despite all obstacles. You welcomed the gift of counsel to help you make good decisions in your Christian life. You were given the gift of knowledge in order to discover, in the light of the Gospel, answers to life's great questions. You received the gift of filial love in order to live as true children of God. You received the gift of worship and of praise in order to pray, celebrate, and give thanks to the Lord. All of these gifts are still in you, they are vital elements: please do not neglect them!

« There is a song that we sing [in French]: 'Come, Holy Spirit, Spirit of life; come transform my heart into a fire of joy, come like a cool breeze, like a friend, come help me witness to my faith. By the beautiful gift of your Spirit, I shall be responsible for my life. If I should ever forget my commitment, Spirit of Jesus, be with me. By the wonderful gift of your Spirit, I shall be transformed like an apostle. Spirit of Jesus, abide in me.' Isn't it a good thing to repeat this prayer, at Pentecost ? Then there is also this [French] song by Robert Lebel, called *It Means*, which gave great meaning to this celebration of Confirmation: 'It means that I believe in you with all my heart; it means that I need you; it means that 'my friend, now and forever I walk with you.' It means: I know how much you love me and how much I mean to you, because since my baptism you really have been a marvelous friend. It means that I want to learn to live like you, by giving love to the fullest, by walking with a more and more generous heart in my everyday life. It means that I know you challenge me to fight for a more beautiful world filled with new life and a new spirit. It means that, trusting in your promise, I want to walk with you because I know that despite my weakness, you, Lord, count on me. It means that beyond the frontiers, colours, languages and thoughts, I want to spread your light and sing of the Spirit of freedom. It means that I want to serve others whether they be great or small, but most of all I want to be with the poor who are hungry and who have no friend.' My dear young friends who have welcomed the Spirit of God, you can still walk with Jesus. You can bring to our Christian communities contagious life and strength and boldness. »

- The Elderly

« In this International Year of Older Persons, in the name of the Church and in my own name I want to tell our elders how much our Christian communities are beholden to you for everything you have done and for all that you are today. With the whole Church I want to point out that the presence of so many elderly people in today's

world is a gift and a splendid richness. You carry in you the priceless values of wisdom and self-giving; you have an invaluable experience, your sense of history and your vision of the world help us have more solidarity with those in our milieu. The difficulties you have experienced, the jobs you have had, the suffering you have endured, and the challenges you have overcome can be an incentive to us to really live life to the fullest, this life so full of promise and challenges, too.

« In a society where efficiency is more often appreciated than kindness, you can feel put aside when it comes to decent housing, pension, social status, work, and other areas of responsibility. It is of the utmost importance that your human rights be respected and that you pursue your role of peace and justice makers in your milieu. You can continue to be very fruitful. Pope John Paul II says, « The retirement of the elderly opens broad avenues to them for apostolic commitment. » The Church bids you to be witnesses to the faith. You are qualified probably better than most for charitable action and apostolic endeavour and this, within liturgical life and in church associations and movements. But I believe that it is mostly to those in your family that you can carry out a very special mission by your life of prayer and your witness to hope and charity. Your way of calmly living your old age and, better still, of living life's trials like illness, suffering, and deaths of loved ones are priceless examples to your close ones and to our Christian communities. Your lively faith in the Living God opens onto a spiritual dimension that is at a premium in our time. You can communicate a sense of the divine, a hunger for God, to coming generations. Following the example of the elderly in the history of salvation, bring, like Moses, the breath of freedom to our world by being people of prayer and contemplation; be like the prophet Simeon or Anna the prophetess, people who can see the wonderful work of God today. We need you, elders of our Church, at the heart of each one of our Christian communities. »

- Families

« Throughout this pastoral letter I have been challenging you, because I count on you to make our Christian communities even more active and more missionary. Pope John Paul II has very often called the family the domestic Church, the Church-family. Accordingly, he states that « in order to be a true domestic church the Christian family needs to be a setting in which parents hand down the faith, since they are for their children, by word and example, the first heralds of the faith. Families should not fail to set time aside for prayer, in which spouses are united with each other and with their children. » And he continues: « There is need to encourage shared spiritual moments such as participating in the Eucharist on Sundays and Holy Days, receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation, daily prayer in the family and practical signs of charity. this will strengthen fidelity in marriage and unity in families. » Within such a family framework, children will be able to easily learn, especially through the example of their parents, that family life is a way of living one's universal call to holiness.

« There are over seventeen thousand families in our diocesan Church, an unparalleled richness. Imagine the power for renewal and even transformation that our communities can live through you, if you continue to carry out all those responsibilities which the Church gives you. I know that much is asked of you, but can we keep faith, hope, and love from growing? Can you hide the light that is in you under a bushel basket? The talents which the Lord gave you at baptism and confirmation, at your marriage and when you received other sacraments, are both for you and for others. Your mission is a demanding one, but so very great and noble. Christian parents, by the love you have for one another, by the harmony you develop in and around you, by the unity you constantly work at, you are accomplishing an indispensable task in our midst, at the heart of our communities and of all the Church. Your life witness is a precious jewel for your children and your neighbours. Your way of living, loving, praying, and forgiving speaks more than any other language. Through the sacrament of matrimony you are signs of the love of Jesus for his people. »

These challenges to three specific groups provoke us to respond resolutely and courageously; they do not dispense any baptised, confirmed, or ordained person from commitments made before the Church and the community. Quite the opposite. They are inseparable from the mission given by Christ to go out to the whole world, to carry the Good News of the Gospel.

- Missionary Prayer

May our diocesan missionary prayer stimulate our apostolic and missionary zeal: « Lord Jesus Christ, we praise you for our life and growth. You faithfully watch over your people: look kindly on our diocesan Church. You invite us to be signs and witnesses of your presence in our world. Choose from among us generous young people and adults who will dedicate themselves to your service and that of our Christian communities. Foster in the hearts of all the baptised the desire to place their gifts and talents to the service of their brothers and sisters. In this way your Church will be the good soil where the seeds of your Kingdom of justice, love, and peace will grow. »

Yours in Jesus and Mary.

+ François Thibodeau

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