



## « A Taste for the Eucharist »

*The Holy Spirit is the Memory of Jesus*  
*49<sup>th</sup> International Eucharistic Congress*

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*PASTORAL LETTER*  
*OF BISHOP FRANÇOIS THIBODEAU, C.J.M.,*  
*OF EDMUNDSTON*  
*FOR THE FEAST OF PENTECOST*  
*MAY 11, 2008*

A Pastoral Letter on the Occasion of Pentecost 2008  
on the Wonderful Day of First Communion  
and Eucharistic Adoration

**A Taste for the Eucharist**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

“Reaching back to my earliest memories of what I experienced in my family in Saint-Odilon, Québec, it is certainly the daily family prayer that has marked me the most, and getting ready for church, the connection between our lives of faith and our mutual relationships, but especially the taste for the Eucharist which our parents instilled in us. Our lives of faith had to be reflected in our daily behaviour. The love we had received together in the sacrament of forgiveness and in the Eucharist had to be applied to our actions and expressions of love, forgiveness, and helping one another. I remember with gratitude the day of May 19, 1946 when for the first time I received the holy Eucharist. We had to go by horse and buggy five kilometres, to the parish church, for the event. We had gotten up around five in the morning so as to be on time for the 6:15 Mass. It was such a joy to welcome into my child’s heart this Jesus who wanted to come and live in me!... I invite you very simply to reach back into your own memories to your First Communion and consider what impact it has had on your lives and the lives of your families.”

**A Taste for the Eucharist**

I spoke those words on June 14, 1998 in the church at Clair in the Upper Madawaska, at the Third Diocesan Eucharistic Congress in preparation for the Jubilee Year 2000. The theme of the Congress was on the Eucharist, the family, and the Day of the Lord. Ten years after this extraordinary event in our Church I ask you, my dear friends, how you go about giving your children and grandchildren, your friends and neighbours, a taste for the Eucharist, and how it is good for us to experience together Eucharistic adoration. I know that it is difficult to compare learning about a sacrament with adapting oneself to a new milieu, but it appears to me that each Christian can contribute to disclosing the grandeur of the sacrament of the Eucharist through his or her behaviour, words, and silences.

**Why Do This on Pentecost?**

Several reasons lead me to publish today this fifteenth pastoral letter for Pentecost, but mainly because the Holy Spirit is the one who helps all people everywhere and throughout history recall “the memory of Jesus.” It is the Spirit who helps us remember everything that the Lord said and accomplished. In recollection all the actions and words of Jesus we are drawn closer to him and our love of him deepens. By giving to the disciples of Jesus his greatest gifts – especially the gift of wisdom – the Holy Spirit gives us the “taste” for Jesus. When in return parents, pastors and educators, marked as they are by the Holy Spirit, repeat to those in their care these words and gestures of Jesus, they contribute to keeping alive the memory of our beloved Saviour. When together they contemplate Jesus in his Eucharist, they contribute to giving humankind a taste for Jesus. I thank my father and mother, my teachers and pastors for having shown me a little bit of the love that Jesus has for me and for everyone. “You are precious to me and I love you.” These words addressed to the Suffering Servant and to the Chosen People are also addressed to every person today, especially to every child who answers the call of Jesus to welcome the Bread of life.

## The 49<sup>th</sup> International Eucharistic Congress

I publish this letter because in a few days we shall be celebrating the 49<sup>th</sup> International Eucharistic Congress. When we recall how the first international eucharistic congresses began, we cannot but thank the Holy Spirit for having raised in his church – especially in France – men and women who discovered the greatness of the Eucharist and who shared with others their “taste” for adoration. We remember Émilie Tamisier (1834-1910), Father Antoine Chevrier (1826-1879), Saint Peter Julian Eymard (1811-1868), the founder of two communities, the Blessed Sacrament Fathers and the Sisters Servants of the Blessed Sacrament. A whole active spiritual current directed to the person of Christ present in the host developed in several Christian communities. In 1873, a number of French politicians even solemnly consecrated France to the Sacred Heart, before the exposed Blessed Sacrament. I was still quite young when I saw for the first time our mayor perform a similar gesture, on the feast of Christ the King. Thanks to the prayers and initiative of Émilie Tamisier; thanks to Bishop Gaspard Mermillod (1824-1891), the bishop of Lausanne and Geneva, Switzerland, and to Pope Leo XIII (1810-1903), the first international Eucharistic congress was held at Lille, France in 1881, with 360 delegates and 3,000 men in the procession! The first congress held outside Europe was in Montreal, in 1910. Like all other Eucharistic activities, national and international congresses, forty-hours devotions or days of adoration, the object of these gatherings is to give us “a taste for the Eucharist,” and it is the Holy Spirit who is at the root of such initiatives.

## Through the Years

My Pentecost 2008 pastoral letter is a mark of special gratitude to all my brothers and sisters of the Church of Edmundston who through the years and seasons have been preparing with an impassioned faith and boundless generosity, our little ones to receive for the first time the beautiful sacrament of the Eucharist, and to welcome in their eager hearts the one whom Pope Saint Pius X proclaimed the Friend of children and youth. This letter is also a heartfelt thank you to my brothers and sisters, the adorers of today. My letter is therefore a thanksgiving to the Holy Spirit without whom there could be no Eucharist, in the Church. Without him we would be unable to recall the words, attitudes and gestures of Jesus; there could be no *epiclesis* (“remembrance” or “calling to mind”), no mass, no Eucharist; and without him, today we would have no parents, educators or pastors to present this admirable sacrament to the people.

## I. First Communions



The Gospels tell us how the first disciples were chosen and sent out as apostles: Jesus had long prepared them for the Last Supper. All we need do is read Jesus' discourse on the bread of life, and about the Transfiguration, for proof of this. Saint John the Evangelist recorded the calling of Andrew and Simon Peter, of James, John and Nathanael. He also recorded the first "miracle" of Jesus, the transformation of water into wine, an indication of other transformations to come. Matthew, Luke and Mark reported the great phenomenon of the Transfiguration, a precursor of what was to occur shortly in the lives of the Apostles. All of them talked about the Eucharist and passed on to us the words of Jesus over the bread and wine. However, John prefers to relate how Jesus "greatly desired to eat the Passover" with his disciples, and he writes about the washing of the feet as an example of kindness and service in the lives of Christ's disciples. Saint Luke records the meeting at Emmaus: during the meal Jesus showed himself to the disciples. They exclaimed: "Were not our hearts burning inside us as he talked to us on the road and explained the scriptures to us?" There is no record of any particular rites for the "first communicants" who naturally joined the other Christians who celebrated the breaking of the bread or the Day of the Lord. The Acts of the Apostles spontaneously tell us that the disciples had gathered together at Troas on the first day of the week: Paul talked on and on – until the middle of the night – to the people gathered in the upper room that was hung with many lamps. A certain young lad named Eutychus, seated on the windowsill became drowsier and drowsier. He finally went sound asleep during Paul's discourse, and fell from the third story to the ground. When they picked him up he was dead. Paul hurried down immediately and threw himself on him, clutching the boy to himself. "Don't be alarmed!" he said to them, "There is life in him." Afterward Paul went upstairs again, broke bread, and ate. Then he talked for a long time – until his departure at dawn. To the great comfort of the people, they were able to take the boy away alive.

### Very Few Special Ceremonies

It seems that up until the 12<sup>th</sup> century or so a child was given first communion at baptism, and this is still the practice in the Eastern Churches. The baby's lips are wet with the consecrated wine. In 1212, Lateran Council IV decided that first communion would be given to children between the ages of 12 and 14. Until the sixteenth century this communion was not marked by any special ceremony, according to documents of the Church at Nanterre, France. From the seventeenth century on, first communion in France took the form of a solemn ceremony at the end of catechism, and then in the nineteenth century it became a rite of passage from childhood to the adult life.

### First Communion of Saint John Mary Vianney (1786-1859)

I would like to recall here three persons who left their mark on the Church and who had a great yearning for the Eucharist: the holy Curé of Ars Saint John Mary Vianney, Saint Bernadette Soubirous, and Saint Theresa of the Child Jesus. Even if they lived in different times and situations, these three people who were marked by their own social background can still show us how "a taste for the Eucharist" can be passed on in families despite wars, persecution, scoffing, and indifference.

During the French Revolution, persecution of the Church broke out in France, and hundreds of priests were killed in the Carmelite Monastery in Paris and the horrible pontoons at Rochefort, the Isle of Ré and at Oléron, as well as in French Guyana. Four of my Eudist confreres were martyred, at the time, the Blessed François Hébert, François Lefranc, Pierre-Claude Pottier, and Simon Mannoury. Even Pope Pius VI did not escape the general fury and died in prison at Valence, August 29, 1799. John Mary would be unable to satisfy his craving for the Eucharist for a long time because the last wave of bloody repression had forced the Lyonnais missionaries to stop all ministry and go into hiding. John Mary was no longer able to assist at a clandestine Mass held in the now-empty barns of Écully, as he used to before going to work. Would this stifle his faith? "He already knew that the celebration of Mass was the spiritual summit of the paschal mystery and that the Eucharist offers us the most intense and perfect presence of the living God."

It was in May of 1798 that John Mary, accompanied by his mother and fifteen other companions, made his first communion following a catechism course and a retreat. Vowed to secrecy and stationed at the windows of the place reserved for them, hay wagons had been placed to fool the "enemy;" the wagons were slowly unloaded by the men keeping watch during the ceremony. Everything had to be done clandestinely: Father Groboz who had not joined those priests who had sworn allegiance to the country's new constitution, had prepared the children very well for their First Communion. Françoise Bouchard writes: "Imagine John Mary's joy in this catacomb atmosphere where his impression of full union with the God he had just received was heightened: 'Oh! My First Communion day was such a beautiful day,' he would later tell his listeners, 'Good Father Groboz was such a good teacher! The day of my First Communion was the most beautiful day of my life, and I will never forget it!'"

### **First Communion of Saint Bernadette Soubirous (1844-1879)**

I would also like to recall the First Communion of two other saints, different from one another as are all the young people who make their First Communion. Their characters and way of expressing themselves are different, and their concerns are different, too. Bernadette Soubirous was born in Lourdes, France, a poor, sickly, asthmatic girl. She lived on and off with an aunt and with her parents in a "dungeon." She was a shepherd girl, watching over the flock. On February 11, 1858 in the grotto of Massabielle she came across a woman who smiled at her. From then until July 18, Bernadette would see "the lady of the grotto" eighteen times; she was dressed all in white, holding a rosary, with two yellow roses on her bare feet. It was only on March 25, 1858 that the lady spoke to her in her native dialect, "*Que soy era Immaculada Councepciou,*" "I am the Immaculate Conception." Bernadette repeated this sentence all the way to the rectory, words whose meaning she could not understand. She was fourteen, and she wanted to prepare during the next three months to make her First Communion, scheduled for June 3, 1858, but she can neither read nor write. She could not keep the people from being sceptical and questioning her. On April 7, 1858 the "miracle of the candle" took place: Bernadette remained insensitive to the burning flame, during that day's silent apparition. While all around her were talking about the marvel to which she was a witness, she alone kept silent, speaking only when questioned, without pretension and with a touching simplicity; she gave clear answers with grave conviction to the many questions that were asked.

At her First Communion on June 3, 1858, she welcomed in her heart the Immaculate Conception's beloved Son who had been revealed to her on March 25. Very happy to have made "her First Communion," all she said, the following day, to one who asked her, "What has made you the happiest, your First Communion or the apparitions?" was: "The two go

together, but they cannot be compared. I was very happy in both cases.” People would come at every hour of the day to her parents’ home, to see her, listen to her, ask questions, and raise objections. Her answers were to the point, short, and quick. To the unbelievers in her apparitions, her only answer was: “I have not been charged with making you believe them. I am charged with telling you.” Violent asthmatic attacks often kept her in bed, and the suffering kept her aware of her limitations. “Perhaps I need to suffer,” she would say. “It seemed impossible that she could ever become a nun; her father could not afford the dowry, she was often sick; she was “good for nothing” and was “ignorant.” After receiving the religious habit in 1866, she said: “I came to Nevers to hide.” It was in peace and humility, prayer and suffering that she lived the last thirteen years of her life.

### **First Communion of Saint Theresa of the Child Jesus (1873-1897)**

In *The Story of A Soul*, Saint Theresa of the Child Jesus writes about May 8, 1884, when she made her First Communion at the age of eleven. The communion was preceded by a three-month preparation and two confessions. “The smallest details of this heavenly day made an everlasting impression on my soul, but I do not want to go into the details. Some things lose their fragrance as soon as they are brought out into the open, and there are some aspirations of the soul that cannot be translated into human language without losing their intimate and heavenly meaning... Oh! How sweet was the first kiss of Jesus upon my soul!... It was a kiss of love, I felt loved, and I said ‘I love you, and I give myself to you for ever.’ There have been no demands, no struggles, no sacrifices for a long time. Jesus and poor little Theresa had looked one another, and they understood one another...

On that day, it was no longer a gaze, but a fusion of hearts, they were no longer two, Theresa had disappeared like the drop of water in the ocean. Only Jesus remained, he was Master and King. Her joy was too great, too deep for her to contain it, tears of happiness flooded her face, to the great surprise of her companions... ‘I was the one who read the act of dedication to the Blessed Virgin, that afternoon. I put all my heart into talking to her, dedicating myself to her like a child who runs into its mother’s arms and asks her protection.’

The day after my First Communion was another beautiful day, but there was a tinge of sadness. The beautiful dress Marie had bought for me, and all the gifts I had received, did not fill my heart. Only Jesus could satisfy me, and I yearned for the day I would receive him the second time. About a month after my First Communion I went to confession for Ascension day and I asked permission to receive holy communion. Against all hope Father gave me permission and I had the joy of kneeling at the holy table between Papa and Marie. I have kept such a beautiful memory of this second visit of Jesus to me! My tears could not be contained, and I kept repeating to myself the words of Saint Paul: ‘I live but not I, it is Jesus living in me’.”

These are touching stories of First Communions... And if we could read them with open eyes, how surprised we would be to discover like stories about our children today, with their sensibility, faith, and solidarity!

## **Our Children's First Communions**

If we only took the time not to question but to listen to our children preparing to make their First Communion we would be surprised to hear about their experiences and emotions. Without being John Marys, Bernadettes or Therasas, it is fantastic to realise all that they can experience at that time. Grace helps them find the correct words, but especially attitudes of adoration, self-giving, wonder, and offering. Because of their First Communion our children can help one another and are even capable of boundless heroism. Despite their age, they discover their friend Jesus and they try to love him with all their hearts. And they have even reached a certain degree of mysticism that cannot be measured, and an incomparable degree of love. Our saints today can be no older than six, nine, or twelve years old... Let us see them with the eyes of Jesus!

### **A New Development**

In 1910, in the decree *Quam Singulari*, Pope Saint Pius X asked that children at a younger age be admitted to first communion, at the age of reason, that is, around the age of seven. This first communion then became known as "private communion" or "little communion," and "solemn communion" continued to be celebrated around 12-13 years of age; it marked the crowning of childhood and the end of catechism. Since the 1970s, though, "private communion-solemn communion" has been replaced by first communion and the profession of faith. Others prefer to stress Confirmation preparation and follow the traditional sequence of the sacraments: baptism, confirmation, eucharist; the place of the sacrament of forgiveness raises some questions, here. In other places, in Ontario and the United States, in order to respect the traditional sequence, the time of confirmation has been moved back to grade two, to the discontent of those who would see confirmation given at a later age. In our Diocese of Edmundston, the usual age for first communion is around grade three; the customary "decorum" (white dress, arm band, etc.) having completely disappeared, after an appropriate preparation each child receives first communion in a very simple way. We can still see First Communion pictures of times past, but memories associated with the event are even more rare than for confirmation. We hope that this communion is the first of many... and not the last.

### **What Is First Communion?**

According to the catechism, first communion is the reception of the sacrament of the Eucharist for the first time. It brings the children into a first contact with Christ by creating an intimate relationship. It touches their hearts and makes them realise that Jesus is close to them. It brings them into themselves to encounter Christ and to help them ask Jesus to help them be good. Some parents would like their child to receive first communion at a young enough age, and that he or she not be obliged to wait for the parish celebration, because they believe that their child is well disposed, and First Communion is a "personal affair..." However, growing in the faith is not a "personal affair" but a richness of the Church. First communion requires serious preparation and supposes that the children have a good understanding of the Eucharist. It also depends on the Christian life of the family...

### **Conditions for Receiving First Communion**

The prerequisites for the disciples receiving the Eucharist were not really specified, in the Gospels: it was their whole journey with Jesus, leading them to the Last Supper. The dioceses decided to specify certain conditions for "making one's first communion:" some requiring maximum preparation, and others require only basic formation. For some, regular

Sunday Mass attendance is part of the experience required by the Church for reception of the Sacrament, besides catechetics and even a spiritual retreat. When fewer than twenty percent of adults attend Sunday Mass regularly, can we make this an obligation for our first communicants? It is sad to realise that some parents even forbid their children from attending Sunday Mass. Regarding catechetics and the retreat, there may be differences!

### **Minimal Conditions**

We find this in the *Canonical and Pastoral Guide for Parishes* (4.1.1): “Children must have demonstrated sufficient knowledge of the Eucharist, have been prepared and have made their first confession. Parents and pastor must see to it that the children who have attained the age of reason be admitted to the Eucharist; before preparing the child to receive communion, one must ascertain that he/she is a Roman Catholic.”

### **Diocesan Guidelines**

In the Diocese of Edmundston, it is already ten years that we let each parish organise its own sacramental preparation programmes for the sacraments of Forgiveness, the Eucharist, and Confirmation. I am amazed at everything parents, catechists and pastors do to make each sacrament meaningful, to have it celebrated after adequate preparation, especially if the first three years of family- or parish-based catechetics are devoted to the sacraments of Forgiveness and of the Eucharist. The sharing that parents have with their children on these sacraments enhance the sacramental preparation. When parents share with their children the joy they feel at receiving Jesus in the Eucharist, a big step is taken by the child. Some parishes also offer Sunday celebrations with the children more involved in the liturgical act. Before receiving communion for the first time, the children must have developed friendship with the Lord Jesus. They must realise that taking communion involves more than coming up to receive the host. It is walking with Jesus and being fed with his presence. The preparation offered can prepare the child for an unforgettable experience of First Communion. In the months to come guidelines will be issued regarding the preparation and celebration of the sacraments of Forgiveness and of the Eucharist. However, we can say that before preparing for First Communion, the child must have gone through the first two levels of family- and parish-based catechetics as approved for the Diocese, or their equivalent. Adults wishing to receive the sacrament of Eucharist for the first time are to be accompanied in their faith journey to the Christian life (catechumenate). Care shall be ensured that they come to this sacrament and its celebration according to preparation adapted to their age.

### **Forgiveness and Eucharist**

First Communion preparation also includes an experience of the sacrament of Reconciliation. Even though our assemblies have been preparing as a community for over thirty years for the sacrament of Forgiveness, the children must recognise the God’s kindness to them, and the repercussions of good and evil on their neighbours. The Church requires that this sacrament be received prior to First Communion as it can have an eminently pedagogical and evangelical impact. Besides, First Communion preparation takes place within the framework of several especially prepared meetings that include recollection and time for special prayers.

## **Role of Parents and Sponsors**

Parents are usually invited to attend information sessions to prepare for First Communion. In this way they can help the child prepare, encourage him or her, answer questions, and show the child the importance of the event. Some Christian communities ask the parents to say a few words of welcome or a prayer; they can express their happiness, give thanks to God, and hope that this first communion will touch the heart of their child, and that it be for the child a day of happiness and peace. They can also commit to helping their child live in the faith and in love of God, and ask the Lord to help their child progress in the Christian life. It is also a good idea that they thank the catechists for all they have done for their child, and thank those who helped the child in a special way prepare for First Communion. As regards the sponsors, it is good that they accompany the child in his/her journey of faith, and that they take part in the celebration: the child's greatest gift is to see his/her sponsor share the same bread of life with them.

## II. CATECHIST TESTIMONIES



I gratefully acknowledge all those catechists who, despite their work load, sent me their testimonial, to share with us in a few words how they went about giving to the children in their care “a taste for the Eucharist.” I am happy to offer you eleven testimonies.

### **An Invitation to the Lord’s Supper**

*When I accepted to be a catechist three years ago, I could not imagine what beautiful project I had gotten into. The desire to learn that these children had, and the discussions we had in our little group, at each meeting, are very beneficial to both the children and me. Each one has input in the meeting, regarding the topic of discussion, and together we develop stories and scenarios, and we have drawings based on everything in their heads. It is important for me to introduce them to Jesus Christ, that they know with certainty that he is always there for us. The Eucharist is, for me, an invitation to the table of the Lord. It is one way of offering thanksgiving and of feeling that he is really in us. This is the message I would like our children to remember. With our new programme, it is very good for the children to look at the pictures and read the different stories related to the theme at hand. We share together about their prayer corner, pictures of their baptism, and the fact that they will soon have pictures of their First Communion. They are very anxious for it since for them, coming up with the adults and share with Jesus is a very important step that makes them a little taller.*

– Lyne

### **Very Special Gifts**

*It is the first time this year that I teach Level Three. I have twelve little ones in my group, they are super good, and they are interested in their catechesis. The first steps are devoted to God the Father who gave us the gift of the earth. These first lessons make us see that two other gifts will be given to us this year, since we are to receive two sacraments, those of Reconciliation and the Eucharist. I shall teach my children that the sacraments are very special gifts that God gives us to help us live as Christians. To initiate the children to the sacrament of the Eucharist, I shall stress the importance of living this sacrament, because Christ gives himself to us wholeheartedly, in the bread and the wine. He gives himself to us as food that helps us grow, act, and love as Christ does. In order to bring home to them the importance of receiving the bread of life, I shall draw the comparison that it is important to nourish the body if we are to be healthy. I shall tell them that it is the same with God, He gives himself to us as food for nourishment, to give us the strength to be like Him. I shall insist on the importance of attending Sunday Mass. Sunday is a special day when we gather together in church to listen to the Word of God and share the meal of the Lord as we receive the bread of life. I think that my children are given a rare privilege in receiving the sacrament of the Eucharist at this time when we celebrate this year the International Eucharistic Congress. I turn to God the Father to guide me through the Third Level, to prepare these little ones as best as possible for the sacraments they are to receive this year.*

– Mona

### **A Banquet**

*To receive the Eucharist is to answer Jesus’ invitation to gather together for a banquet. Yes, it is Jesus himself who invites us to his meal. He invites all his friends, young and old,*

to share together the good bread of his word. The word that Jesus gives us is his assurance of how he loves us and how he wants us to be friends with each other. He also tells us that God our Father loves us very much, and it is this same love that we give to others. Besides telling us of his love, Jesus offers us his body and blood, and his very life. In the same way, we can be in communion with him and know that he is present in us every moment of our lives. When we go to church we join our friends, brothers and sisters to tell God our Father that we are happy to be friends with Jesus and that we want to live with the others when things go well and when they don't, because we know that Jesus helps his friends when he is asked. When we say that the Eucharist is a sacrament, we say that Jesus calls us, that he waves at us, that he hugs us in his arms. Jesus says that he wants us to be happy, and he gives us the tools we need for living in his joy, a joy we share with others. "Thank you, Jesus, for your presence, with your Father and the Spirit of love who enlightens us and warms our hearts."

– Pierre

### **Enthusied at Doing Catechetics**

As facilitator for Level Three for grade 3 students, I never would have thought that I could have become enthused by this. A high school teacher at heart, I have always been passionate about teaching and giving our children what is best, by giving them the tools necessary for success and for their well-being. Now I can get a further grand experience with seven and eight year-olds. There is nothing cooler than this! First of all, I am delighted by the fact of being able to address all these little faces filled with enthusiasm and a desire to get to know Jesus better. Their amusing and spontaneous comments bring liveliness to our get-togethers. The opportunity of spending quality time with these unsophisticated and affectionate children fills me with joy. They are an undeniable gift to the animators. In order to involve them actively in the group, the participation of the main actors is required. This is why we have them do mimes and colourful sketches on the exciting texts that are in our programme. Through the pleasant exchanges between the students and their animators, the fun activities and wonderful discoveries, we give our children the desire to reach beyond themselves, to enrich their knowledge, and to desire the Eucharist and deepen their faith. The fact of enjoying being with them at these special times adds a touch of magic, and because of our example the children want to come and share with us. They are so eager to attend these meetings that at the very moment the magic is there, we know with certainty that we have attained our objective. We are all bound together with love, and it is through activities that draw the children that we invite them to welcome the mystery of faith, the word of God, and to love the earth as Jesus did: all of these treasures are buried for life deep within their little hearts. Together we make a difference! Is there no greater gift to offer than to love one another in faith, and to enjoy oneself? "Dream like you never have, with the aim of realising a few of them" (Jacques Brel).

– Martine

### **Source of Life**

Our children appreciate simple words. As a catechist I tell them that Eucharist is the source of life and the most precious gift that the Lord gave us before his death. Passing this great mystery on to our children can be done in different ways in our lives, and day-to-day. The most determining and interesting fact in life is that the Lord is always with us and among us. Every day I pray to him: "Thank you, Lord, for being there with the Eucharist:" this special thank you lives in our hearts.

– Isabelle

### **A Gift of Immense Value**

*Gabrielle remembers her First Communion, during her third year of religious education. This particular level consists of six sessions where the children's awareness is raised step by step to recalling their baptism and the celebration of forgiveness. Each child is led to an instance in the life of Saint Francis of Assisi, who saw the earth as God's gift. Such a discovery by the children helps raise their level of wonder as they get a better understanding of Jesus. Following the course guide, we make the children aware by tying these facts in the life of Francis to their own small lives. This comes through in the way they behave towards their schoolmates, and how they conduct themselves in school generally, at home, and with their friends. Following their development as small children, what is most determining and interesting in the children's lives in order to receive this beautiful gift that is the Eucharist, is seeing them getting excited about the very moment they will receive the Father's gift. I am not totally certain that at that age they realise the immense value of this gift. So, what makes this question interesting is to continue developing with the children and deepening their understanding of our great Creator God in three persons.*

**– Grandpa Roger and his Grand-daughter**

### **Making God Present**

*To give the children a taste for communion, I tell them that the Eucharist is the bread of life that God gives us, and that it is a privilege to be able to receive it at church. This bread revives our spirit and helps us be Christians who follow in the footsteps of Jesus. To pass on this mystery to the children I tell them that we are not pure spirits and that we need visible signs of God's presence: it is exactly for this that Jesus came, to make God present. The bread, which is an element of daily life, is the best symbol of this. It is terrific to have a God who makes himself close to us in our material needs, to change this bread into spiritual nourishment. In order to receive communion, it is important to be in a state of greeting, of openness, and of faith. Otherwise, it is like getting a gift and not bothering to look at it, use it, or say thank you. One must desire it, have an open heart, and appreciate it... When the Bread of Life is received, it continues its work in the person receiving it. And so, if I really had God's gift I would not hesitate, and I would receive communion every Sunday!*

**– Louise**

### **Comfort and Hope**

*My experience as a catechist is most enriching, a special moment that I share with my son and a group of his friends. At this Third Level we prepare two great events, forgiveness, and the Eucharist. The work of the catechist is special because we have the opportunity of sharing the word of God through experiences in the life of Jesus and finding connections with the daily experience of our children. Today life is very complex, the children experience all kinds of emotions, anxieties, and joys. It is a moment I use to share my own experience as a person and a mother. It is a period when they are free to share with us the good and bad moments they have, a time, too, to share the word of God with them; through prayer, they can find comfort and hope. I try to look at life through the eyes of these children, so as to appreciate it in a new way. My experience as a catechist allows me to question my own faith in God: do I apply the word of God that I am passing on to this group of children? We must teach them that life has obstacles, but that through them all we are given the opportunity to deepen our faith in God and become better persons.*

**– Nicole**

### **With More Than Words**

*I would first like to say how much I enjoy trying to help the children in their spirituality, especially this year when they prepare for the sacrament of forgiveness and the sacrament of the Eucharist. Besides, I truly believe that it is not only with words that it is important to communicate, but also with our beliefs and actions. This is how I try to communicate with the children in my group. And during discussions on forgiveness and communion, I have discovered even more how the word of God and Jesus himself are important for them. To give them the opportunity to participate and to share during the gathering is to give them the opportunity to apply what they are learning to their daily experience. For instance, forgiveness becomes more than an abstract concept: it has beneficial effects in their lives and relationships.*

**– Jean-Robert**

### **A Mystery of Wonderful Love**

*It is not easy today for parents to give their children a proper Christian education because they lack religious experience and do not know where to begin and how to go about it. For four years now I have had the opportunity to live an enriching and exciting experience, as I have been given the privilege of dispensing the information necessary so that our children, with the help of their parents, can prepare for the sacrament of the Eucharist. For me, the secret for a good preparation to First Communion is being able to develop in oneself a craving for getting to know always more about our friend “Jesus.” At our gatherings I try to pass on to them what I know and as far as possible, help them meet Jesus Christ and teach them how to recognise him. I show them a face of Jesus that is meaningful to them: a Jesus of love, Creator, present, near to us, who loves us just as we are, speaks to us, forgives us, and listens to us. They learn from the accounts of others and through videos the meaning of sharing, welcoming, respect, forgiveness, and giving freely, in daily life. I give them a specific “mission,” during the gathering: saying a prayer, reading a scripture verse, answering questions. They even have the chance of living an experience by sharing in the life of the Christian community, at parish celebrations. The sacrament of the Eucharist marks the beginning of a life-long friendship with Jesus, as it is reflected in the parable of the vine. The evening of Holy Thursday, following the meal he shared with his friends, Jesus told them: “I am the vine and my Father is the vine grower. He prunes away every barren branch, but the fruitful ones he trims clean to increase their yield... Live on in me, as I do in you... He who lives in me and I in him will produce abundantly... The commandment I give you is this: love one another.” What is the most interesting in life in order to receive this gift better is that through communion we can remain united to Jesus, as if his life’s energy pours itself out in us. Let us go, then, and we shall be able to bear fruit! To me, this is a mystery of wonderful love!*

**– Marie-Paule**

### **Wishing to Receive the Eucharist**

*I have prepared children to receive the Eucharist since before Vatican II, in the days of the old Baltimore Catechism. Many wonderful changes have occurred over the years. I have had the experience of preparing other people’s children, preparing my own children, and assisting other parents in preparing their children. By far the most satisfying experience has been in preparing my own children, and equal to that is the joy of assisting others who are preparing theirs. Each month the children and their parents are proud to show me the scrapbooks they are making at home. Through their treasured works of art and photos, I can visualize a faith that begins in the family and is very much “alive.” They document their*

*experiences of friendship, forgiveness, and making and breaking bread together at special family meals. I have even seen photos of small hands squeezing grapes to make wine! Memories are being made and firm faith foundations are being formed. The parents are already giving their children the “desire” to receive the Eucharist. So what do I do or say to build up this foundation and make their desires grow?*

*I tell them it is because Jesus loves us so much that he gives us “his real Body and his real Blood.” I make sure they know that the substances of bread and wine are changed and that we will never know how this is done because it is a mystery. A mystery that only the gift of faith can cause us to believe! I tell them to approach the sacrament with reverence because it is the living Jesus they are receiving. They are also reminded that Jesus loves children, and he invites them to come to him. With this in mind I encourage them to talk silently to him from the depths of their little hearts. They can tell him whatever delights them as whatever troubles them. Jesus gives us strength to overcome the hurdles of life. We must always thank him. I tell them that it is by our good behaviour that others will know we belong to Jesus who is alive in our hearts! If every person knew and truly believed in the “real presence” of Jesus in this sacrament there would be standing room only at our Sunday Eucharist, and the rafters would vibrate with the joyful sounds of celebration! To receive this precious gift we need to love, forgive each other, trust, and believe like little children that Jesus is alive and real!*

**– Anita**

### III. Wonder and Adoration



Following what we can discover in the sacrament of the Eucharist, through the work of the Holy Spirit down the centuries, and following on everything that parents, educators, and pastors have said about the Eucharist, I am brought to give grateful thanks for all these wonders. Besides, the Church itself invites us to “adore” the Blessed Sacrament. Eucharistic devotion has spiritually sustained faithful and communities that were in demanding situations. This devotion has given hope, deepened the faith, and energized the love of many.

#### Predecessors

The example set by my predecessors invite me to this adoration, to this wonder and like thanksgiving. Bishop Marie-Antoine Roy, O.F.M., Edmundston’s first bishop (1945-1948) desired to proclaim the greatness of Christ, and to this end he asked the Sisters Servants of the Blessed Sacrament to come to the Diocese and establish here the Cenacle of Christ the King. Bishop Joseph-Romeo Gagnon (1949-1970), for whom to live meant Christ himself, was filled with wonder at the founding of every parish. Bishop Fernand Lacroix, C.J.M., third Bishop of Edmundston (1970-1983), whose episcopal motto was “Christ in all things”, was deeply involved in the conciliar renewal, especially in the liturgy. Bishop Gerard Dionne, our fourth Bishop (1984-1993) truly lived out his motto “I am your brother” and revealed to us in this way the closeness of Jesus, of which he is an outstanding sign. Since adopting the motto “His love is from age to age” in 1994, I, too, have tried with God’s grace to proclaim the infinite wonders of our beloved Saviour.

#### Already in 1973...

In the spring of 1983, some twenty years ago, Bishop Fernand Lacroix’ health forced him to resign his episcopal ministry in Edmundston. Impassioned about the Eucharist, he had written to his people in the diocese, on February 14, 1973, this note on the Australian International Congress: “There are so many regional, national, and international congresses that we no longer take notice of them unless we are personally involved with them or affected by them. The Eucharist affects us all, or at least it should... Jesus loved his own, his disciples, those who believed in him and in his mission. He wanted to maintain his presence among us, to be with his own and be joined to them in the most intimate way. He thus became our food. Why? To keep us united together, create with us his Father’s family, involve us in his sacrifice and in his main ministry of redeeming the world. “Love one another as I have loved you.” This is the greatest fruit of the Eucharist. This is also what it is meant to express. The Eucharist is the sign of unity, an effective sign that shows and creates unity among those who live from it. These words of the Lord were chosen by Pope Paul VI as the theme of the Melbourne Congress. The Lord is present among us and gives himself to us. Let us welcome him and offer ourselves to him.”

#### A Praying Community

These past few years we have been noticing, through several churches in Canada – especially in our milieu, in the wake of the five diocesan eucharistic congresses – a renewal in Eucharistic practice. It is such a source of joy to see the faithful of all ages spend time before Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. We sometimes see these people at large gatherings or at the doors of churches open for prayer, and sometimes in chapels

where there is perpetual adoration. We often note the peaceful joy that is characteristic of those who come to spend time before the Blessed Sacrament. Among these people there are also children who take a few moments to be with Jesus, their friend. Their peaceful faces and kindness of their gestures do not go unnoticed. I thank God for His gift of His Son in the Eucharist, for the faithful who take the time to meet him in silence and contemplation, and for the priests who prolong in this way the marvel of the Mass. I am certain that one of the main consequences of the 49<sup>th</sup> International Eucharistic Congress will be to give local Christian communities adorers that the world needs so much, people who pray for their brothers and sisters like Abraham, Moses and Jesus did, people who give thanks, like Mary, Peter and Paul. Isn't the value of life measured by its weight in adoration?

### **The Most Perfect Adorer**

Adoration is the spontaneous reaction of someone in the presence of his/her Creator. It springs automatically from the heart that contemplates the grandeur of creation, the beauty of an artistic work, or the mystery of the human person. Creation is like a living "icon," a living "image" of the Creator. Whoever admires creation implicitly worships the One who is its source. The practice of worship or adoration is found in all religions, in various guises. With the people of Israel especially, adoration was held in high esteem, and is part of their creed: "Listen, Israel, the Lord your God is One. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength." It is in this sense that the Psalms and prophecies open us to this great reality that is adoration. And the Son of God, by being born in the Jewish nation, developed this human attitude of adoration. It corresponds in fact perfectly with the relationship he has with the Father in the Spirit, from all eternity. This is why during his life on earth Jesus took time to pray in the mountains. When his apostles asked him to teach them how to pray he first invited them to adoration by invoking God as "our Father who art in heaven." Isn't this the core of all prayer of adoration? Furthermore, in Jesus' usual way of life we see that it was but a single act of adoration that reached its summit at his death on the cross. His whole life was praise, love, and worship of the Father whose will was his daily bread. However, it was on the cross that Jesus showed his full submission to the Father's plan, as Jesus offered not only his prayer but his very life in an ultimate gesture of love and fidelity. When we contemplate Jesus on the cross we discover and worship the perfect adorer, the model of all those who worship. Christ is the Father's most perfect adorer. Our adoration must be united to that of Jesus. It is not a private act but one where believers are united to Christ the adorer. His adoration is the source of ours.

### **Prayer Books**

In 1643 Saint John Eudes founded a congregation of priests, the Congregation of Jesus and Mary, a congregation that he wanted holy and dedicated to the training of good workers in the Lord's vineyard. In 1668 he composed a manual of prayers for his community, a book with a number of spiritual exercises for use by an ecclesiastical community. He had already published a first such book in 1637, *The Life and Kingdom of Jesus in the Christian Soul*, where he had set down for all the baptised daily, weekly, monthly and annual spiritual exercises to let them have Jesus live and reign in them. When I entered the Eudist seminary in 1957 I was taken up by these pious exercises, and especially with the litanies that John Eudes had composed in honour of the Blessed Sacrament and that we would pray on Holy Thursday each year. Here are the many descriptive words he found in the Gospels, to describe the wonders of the Eucharist: "living bread come down from heaven, Almighty Bread of the Word of God made flesh, true body

born of the Virgin Mary, True body pierced through on the cross, True blood shed in the passion of the Lord, Venerable sacrament to be adored, Lamb without blemish, Holy Host, Honour of the eternal Father, Glory of the Virgin Mary, Covenant of our Father, memorial of the Lord's passion, Hidden Lord and Saviour, Word made flesh living in us, Table of the Lord set by the angels, Bread of angels given to us as food for the journey, Bread that gives us strength, Drink that rejoices us, Indescribable gift of God, Priest and host, Sacrament of sacraments, Mystery of faith, Glory of Christians, Treasure of priests, etc." These descriptions were an aid to helping us focus on the many facets of this great sacrament.

### Recent Documents

Ever since Pope John Paul II published his encyclical on the Eucharist and instituted a year of the Eucharist, a number of works have been published, like those of the Synod Fathers in 2005, and Pope Benedict XVI on the sacrament of love. In the Diocese of Edmundston we had the privilege in 2007 of having an interdiocesan retreat with our Francophone priest-confreres of the Bathurst, Moncton and Saint John dioceses, led by Father Jean-Yves Garneau, S.S.S., and Cardinal Marc Ouellet. Father Garneau is the director of the French magazine *Prêtre et pasteur* ("Priest and Shepherd"), and is one of the most prolific writers on the Eucharist. Besides giving us *Découvrir l'Eucharistie, Paroles pour la route, Prières devant le Saint Sacrement* ("Discovering the Eucharist, Words for the Journey, Prayers before the Blessed Sacrament"), he has been publishing several other books on the occasion of the Québec International Eucharistic Congress. I invite those of you who can to read his writings with your heart. I also invite you to read the writings of Saint Peter Julian Eymard: they are full of solid nourishment for true eucharistic adoration.

### Contemplation

I conclude this Letter by quoting a traditional hymn: *Panis angelicus fit panis hominum; dat panis caelicus figuris terminum. O res mirabilis, manducat Dominum pauper, servus et humilis. Te trine Deitas unaque poscimus, sic nos tu visita, sicut te colimus; per tuas semitas duc nos quo tendimus, ad lucem quam inhabitas.* I am united to all the masses celebrated throughout the world as I repeat the words that are so rich and wonderful: "God our Father... at the heart of our separated and broken world, we know and we proclaim that you do not cease to act and that you are at the origin of every peace effort... Open our eyes to the distress that surrounds us. Inspire us always to speak the word that is needed when we are faced with our lonely and distressed brothers and sisters. Give us the courage of the fraternal gesture for the deprived or the oppressed. May your Church be a place of truth and freedom, justice and peace so that everyone may have a reason to continue to hope."

+ François Thibodeau *in*

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