
A BISHOP'S FIRST DUTY



On February 28 last I addressed my first Pastoral Letter to all the priests and future priests of the Church of Edmundston: the Lord has truly chosen them; he has called them, he has anointed them and sent them to bring the Good News to their brothers and sisters. And so, over the next few weeks I would like to share this letter with you.

A BISHOP'S FIRST DUTY

The 'Directory for Bishops in Their Pastoral Ministry' describes a bishop's primary task as follows: "Just as Jesus showed his special love for his disciples when he constituted them ministers of his true and mystical body, so does a bishop, through whom Our Lord Jesus Christ is present in the midst of the faithful, know full well that he has the duty of consecrate the best part of his love and solicitude to the priests and to future priests."

During these first few weeks in the Diocese of Edmundston, I have wanted to express the best of my love to each one of our priests, repeating the fact that the Lord's Love is from age to age. On the evening of my episcopal ordination I stated: 'Priests, deacons and seminarians of the Church of Edmundston, I would like to express to you in a very special way my desire to be totally united to you throughout my ministry at Edmundston. The Lord loves us without measure; let us never doubt this. The Lord asks us to be shepherds after his heart, to proclaim by our whole lives that the love of God is alive and well! For this, we must first and foremost be persevering in prayer and in the service of the Word.'

GESTURES OF COMMUNION

Last March 28 we experienced the wonderful celebration of the Chrism Mass, during which we showed our deep solidarity and true communion by offering the accolade. This Mass was like a prelude to the great celebrations of the Paschal mystery. We constantly proclaim together the great mystery of faith to which we are closely associated: the death of Jesus, his resurrection and his return in glory. On May 21, 1994, we shall all be invited to our friend Jeff Doucette's priestly ordination: what a grace for our Church! And what obligations for us. I consider it an exceptional favour to ordain one of ours to the priesthood, hardly a few months after my own episcopal ordination.

A SINGULAR VOCATION, A MARVELLOUS MISSION

As a successor to the apostles, I invite the priests, in the words of St. Paul, not to neglect the gift that is in them which was given through the laying on of hands [Cf. 1 Tim. 4:14]. It is not a spirit of fear that God has given, but a Spirit of strength, of love and of self-control. May they never be embarrassed to witness to Our Lord, but rather may they be ready to suffer with me for the sake of the Gospel, sustained by the strength of God who has called us not because of our deeds but according to His own intentions and His grace.

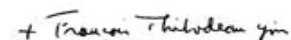
The more we meditate together the wonder that is the priestly call and mission, the more shall we be grateful, the more shall we be united to one another, emulating one another and the entire people of God to whom we have been sent, in the exercise of mutual respect and solidarity.

HERALDS OF JOY

I have urged the priests to read and re-read the letter entitled 'Messagers de Joie' ['Heralds of Joy'], written by Cardinal Godfried Danneels, Archbishop of Brussels. It is a call to serious reflection, but not to anxiety and estrangement. We must recognise the place and the charism of our religious and lay brothers and sisters, and we must live fully the mission which God has given us and which the Church has sanctioned through ordination. Each and every priest is my immediate collaborator in teaching, sanctifying, and serving the people of God. And our entire lives - including, especially, those moments of moral and physical suffering - must be spent in proclaiming the Good News of Jesus. A profound joy, such as that promised by Jesus, must radiate from us so that we may truly be witnesses to this joy of Christ. Methods may change, but our mission remains the same. Whether I have one week or sixty years of ordination, it is the same Gospel that I must live and propagate. That I have twenty or fifty years of ordination, my prayer life must be as intense and more so as time goes by, otherwise I am but a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal [Cf. 1 Cor. 13:1b]. 'We [must] devote ourselves to prayer and to serving the word' [Acts 6:4]: THIS is the deepest meaning of our mission... To pray is also to let oneself be loved by God.

CONTACTS

I shall return presently to this Letter to the Priests. As of April 12 I completed a first round of visits to all the parishes of the diocese: this was truly a pilgrimage through the Church of Edmundston, for me. With you I thank God for all the great, the holy and the good experienced in the 32 parishes. I have already started my second round of visits, this time for confirmations. With you I give thanks for these young people, for their parents and their teachers. And it is in a true spirit of gratitude that I visit the schools which these young believers attend. May this Easter season bring you Joy.



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