
"O EDMUNDSTON, BELOVED CHURCH!"



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

GOOD NEWS IN THE MIDST OF WAR

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

AN IMPORTANT ROLE

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

1944-1994

A good number of our compatriots could tell us at length about the events that have marked the history of our young Church. For example, you can ask those couples who were married in 1944-1945 what happened that year, and I am sure that they will proudly and happily tell you about it. The fifty years of Church life are well documented by a number of articles and monographs, and personal recollections, and a number of institutions also bear witness to those years. A forthcoming publication will tell us of the highlights of our diocesan history, and in each of our parishes and within our homes the heart of the budding Church of 1944 still beats strongly, but oftentimes unbeknownst to those around. I hope that each family take the time to talk about all that has been experienced

through the years, all that was beautiful, holy, and grand in your home which is like a "domestic Church," since there also an intense Church life can be experienced and celebrated. In the course of the numerous get-togethers throughout this holy year, it would be nice to have family celebrations highlighting the values which motivated the lives of your parents and grandparents: may these values which they passed on to you continue to flourish in your homes. All of this is part of the Church that we form. With you I exclaim: "We are proud, this is our daily life!" If only we took the time to look, listen, and love, this Edmundston Diocese Church would truly be a motive for thanksgiving and wonderment.

WHAT THEN IS THE CHURCH?

If Church life extends to all that we are and all that we do, what then is the Church? Four major documents can help our reflection: on August 6, 1964, Pope Paul VI published a remarkable encyclical letter entitled *Ecclesiam Suam*, on the paths along which the Church must carry out its mission in the world of today: the paths of conscience, renewal, and dialogue. The timeliness of this document is still apparent. Three months later - November 21, 1964 - the same pope promulgated the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, which had just been voted on by the Second Vatican Council. On December 7, 1965, Pope Paul promulgated yet another master document, the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* on the Church in the Modern World. Finally, on October 11, 1992, Pope John Paul II published the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. In this our jubilee year, these four major text can inspire our reflection. Regarding the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, let me point out that numbers 748-975 deal exclusively with our profession of faith, "I believe in the Holy Catholic Church" [Article 9]. The new Catechism presents a vision of the Church within God's plan; the Church: People of God, Body of Christ, Temple of the Holy Spirit; the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church; the faithful of Christ: hierarchy, laity, consecrated life; the communion of saints; Mary: Mother of Christ, Mother of the Church. In this section you will find answers to your questions and reasons for giving thanks.

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