
A HEART FILLED WITH GRATITUDE



It is good, during this holy year marking the 50th anniversary of our diocese, to give thanks to the Lord for all those who worked at building the Church in the Diocese of Edmundston. Thank you to the parents, grandparents, and families of the diocese, for having built up on a daily basis this beloved Church of ours. Thank you to teachers and educators who took the time to pass on to children in their care the invaluable values of faith, hope, and charity. Thank you to the workers who have struggled daily to bring the necessities of life and who truly built this Church. Thank you to all those who spread the Gospel of Jesus in their organisations, associations, and professions. Thank you to those working in the mass media, to those involved in the political, social, and cultural spheres who witnessed to the values of solidarity, truth, and justice.

GRATITUDE TO THE PRIESTS OF YESTERYEAR

On November 28 I wrote a few words to the priests of the diocese, expressing my gratitude and that of the entire Church, to them. Since Catholics of this region were at one time or another under the jurisdiction of the bishop of Québec, of Charlottetown, of Fredericton, of Saint John, and of Chatham, I am reminded of all those bishops and priests who devoted themselves in our midst, to implant the Gospel. In the first place I think of my four predecessors: Bishop Marie-Antoine Roy, [O.F.M.], Bishop J.-Romeo Gagnon, Bishop Fernand Lacroix [C.J.M.], and Bishop Gerard Dionne. I also think of those missionaries who first came to the Madawaska region, beginning with the missionary work of Father Adrien Leclerc (1785-1792), up to the years of ministry of the Grand Vicar Monsignor Louis-Napoléon Dugal (1880-1929). I am reminded of Father Charles Swéron (1859-1864), who was the first resident priest at St-François; of Father Louis-Côme D'Amours (1880-1908) and of Monsignor William Conway, P.A., V.G. (1908-1961). I am reminded of Father John O'Leary (1868-1892), the first resident priest at Grand Falls. I am also reminded of Monsignor Numa Pichette (1938-1971), founder of the parish of Notre-Dame-des-Douleurs, and of Monsignor Joseph-Arthur Melanson who was missionary-colonist in the Restigouche. I also think of Monsignor Eudore Martin, Monsignor Solyme Azzie, Monsignor Camille Leclerc, Monsignor Lang, Monsignor Daigle, etc. How can we not invoke the memory of all these founders of parishes in our diocese, all of which parishes were established before the founding of the diocese of Edmundston, with the exception of six: Perth-Andover (1946), Saint-Jean-Baptiste (1948), Saint-Martin (1948), Connors (1950), Notre-Dame-du-Sacré-Coeur (1950), and Saint-Georges (1950).

GRATITUDE TO THE RELIGIOUS ORDER PRIESTS

I also remember the precious help we received from religious communities. Already in 1869, a Holy Cross Father, Fr. Jean-B. Doucet, C.S.C., is reported at Saint-Basile; there is also Fr. J.C. Éthier, C.S.C. (1873-1875) and Father J.B. Bazoge, C.S.C., at St-François. At the end of 1903, Fathers Aimé Morin, C.J.M., Alphonse Cottreau, C.J.M., and Pierre Lechantoux, C.J.M., arrived at the Maliseet reservation, were the first missionaries to Plaster Rock in 1904, in gave missions in a number of parishes in Madawaska County and in Maine. In February, 1946, Bishop M.-Antoine Roy signed an agreement with the Eudist Fathers to open a college in Edmundston, the Collège St-Louis, named in honour of Monsignor Louis Dugal, the Apostle of Madawaska and a great friend of youth. Much gratitude to all the Franciscans who worked very hard not only in the parish of St-Coeur-de-Marie of Baker Brook and region, but throughout the entire territory of the actual Southern Victoria Deanery. To the illustrious name of the first bishop of Québec [Bishop Laval] can be added the names of devoted confrères who, like Father Joseph Moisan, O.F.M. and Normand Thibodeau, O.F.M., gave of themselves in service to our Church. How can we adequately thank the Oblate fathers who for close

to a quarter of a century organised so many spiritual renewal activities at the Retreat House that was founded by Father Joseph-Aurèle Plourde and Joseph Lelannic? Much gratitude is owed to the members of the Voluntas Dei Secular Institute who had the major seminary at Red Rapids and who continue to serve in the southern Victoria parishes. Thanks also to all the preachers and missionaries who passed our way: members of the St. Pius X Secular Institute, the Marist Fathers, Foreign Mission Fathers, etc.

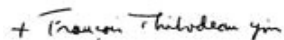
It is therefore hundreds of priests that we must carry, in our thanksgiving: May the Lord give them one hundredfold everything they did for the cause of his Gospel and his Church. they were zealous and faith-filled priests: May they be an inspiration to us today.

GRATITUDE TO OUR PRIESTS TODAY

If in 1970 we had one hundred diocesan and religious priests among us, for different reasons their number has shrunk considerably, today... The Edmundston Diocese presently has 59 diocesan and religious priests: ten incardinated priests, five of whom are members of the [Québec] Foreign Mission Society, live outside the diocese; 2 priests are incardinated in another diocese, nine are religious priests, fifteen diocesan priests are now retired or on sick leave, and twenty-three priests are involved in active pastoral ministry.

With you I thank God for all that the priests are, at the heart of our diocese. I join you in thanking them and in encouraging them to courageously and boldly pursue the beautiful mission entrusted to them, of prayer, proclamation of the Good News, of celebration of the sacraments, and of building together the Christian community. You are well aware of the challenges our priests are faced with, today, but I point out a few so that you may help them respond with courage and serenity: a deep holiness based on a meditation of the Word of God, and daily heart-to-heart encounters with Jesus in humble and trusting prayer; an essential unity with the entire presbyterium, united with the bishop; a constant availability to the will of God, so as to respond according to our aptitudes to the pastoral needs of our brothers and sisters; an openness of soul to the 60,000 persons forming this beloved Church of Edmundston; ongoing pastoral formation, to respond adequately to the requirements of a new evangelisation; an acute sense of the pastoral team and of co-responsibility with our lay brothers and sisters; boundless hope in order to overcome any defeatist attitude, etc. The few months I have lived with you are an assurance that together they can pick up these challenges. All of this is full of hope for the future of our Church. Meeting a priest who is happy with himself is a deep invitation to live in the wake of the Beatitudes of Jesus. One of the graces we can ask the Lord during our diocesan Jubilee is surely that He send us numerous and holy Gospel workers.

Have a good week!



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

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