
LENT 1995



Here we are once again in the season of Lent, and along with you I hope that this be for us all a good lenten period. Notwithstanding differences in modality, Lent 1995 is still very timely. What is important is that we renew our hearts so as to celebrate the coming Easter. "Give us, Lord, a heart renewed, and place in us a new Spirit." A new heart that beats in rhythm with that of Jesus; a new heart so as to better love one's sisters and brothers here and elsewhere. A new heart that warmly welcomes these 40 days as an outstanding period of spiritual renewal, conversion, deepening of one's faith, one's charity, and one's hope. The 50 years of our diocese can be instructive to us, in this sense.

WAYS OF LIVING LENT BETTER

Each one will discover for oneself the best way of living Lent 1995. It is likely that there will be 60,000 ways of doing it, in the Edmundston Diocese, whether it be at the elementary, secondary, college or university levels, whether it be in the workplace or on unemployment, in the hospital or at home. The important thing is to find the way of developing a more loving heart, a heart turned to Christ and one's brothers and sisters. Through the centuries, three ways have occupied pride of place, in the living out of Lent: prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. These have been tried and true methods that inevitably attain their goal.

PRAYER

I often say to whomever wants to hear, "People pray, in the diocese of Edmundston!" Of course, it is difficult for me to evaluate such a prayer, but on a number of occasions I have felt that in families and parishes much stress is put on prayer, and I heartily congratulate you for this. The young and not so young, working and retired people and sick people have told me that they pray. And I do not doubt their statement. Each first Thursday of the month, a number of these people join me for a day of prayer. Others have told me, "We cannot spend the day at the Diocesan Centre, but we have offered up our day for our diocese." In my visits to the sick I have noticed how these people had a sense of prayer even in the midst of their suffering. During this Lenten period of 1995, isn't it true that more progress can be made in this direction of finding the time necessary for silent prayer of praise and supplication? Maybe a short prayer can be said at the table; it might be a good opportunity to restore the custom of evening prayer together... It is up to each one to see what can be done, during these forty days.

FASTING AND ALMSGIVING

In Canada, those between the ages of 18 and sixty are called to fasting and abstinence on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. On those days, we are urged to give ourselves to prayer in a special way, to practice works of piety and charity, and to deny ourselves by more faithfully carrying out our daily obligations. It is in such a context that our concern for our more needy brothers and sisters is placed. What we save through fasting we can share with those who have nothing to eat. Since 1967, the Catholic Organisation for Development and Peace has been very active in our midst. On this point also I want to congratulate you for your generosity and invite you to continue this beautiful sharing; from our Diocese more than \$50,000.00 have been distributed to our brothers and sisters in the Third World. We hear about suppers of sharing, famine suppers, and marks

of solidarity, throughout the Diocese. Lent opens our hearts to the world's distress. Our fasting, in union with that of Jesus in the desert, takes on a totally new significance.

ILLITERACY

In his 1995 Lenten Message, Pope John Paul II draws our attention to the phenomenon of illiteracy. He writes: "I wish to reflect with you all on the obscure evil which keeps countless poor people from the possibilities of progress, of victory over marginalisation, and of true liberation. I am thinking of illiteracy. Pope Paul VI already reminded us that hunger for learning is no less depressing than hunger for food. An illiterate person is an undernourished spirit. This terrible wound contributes in keeping vast multitudes in a condition of underdevelopment with all that it includes of scandalous misery. Where there is illiteracy, there also reigns - and more than elsewhere - hunger, illnesses, child mortality, as well as humiliation, exploitation, and suffering of all kind." Thanks to God, thanks to the devotedness of parents and teachers, thanks to the vigilance of governments, we have better and better school networks that aim at excellence. But in spite of this, there is still a considerable number of our fellow-citizens who can neither read nor write. Much gratitude is owed to those who struggle against illiteracy. Among other groups I am reminded of Literacy New Brunswick which has won high praise for the work it has accomplished throughout the province.

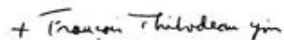
FROM RWANDA A THANK YOU TO YOU!

I pass on to you the thanks I have received from Mme Gabrielle Lachance, director general of Development and Peace, on the occasion of the special collection that was taken up in our diocese, last September. "Thanks to your support and your collaboration, Development and Peace and its partners succeeded in setting up an efficient plan of action in response to the tragic events which have unfolded in Rwanda. In collaboration with its Rwandan partners, the Canadian Catholic Organisation for Development and Peace is actually involved in longer-term economic, agricultural, and community programmes. The aim of these programmes is to reinforce Rwanda's democratic structures and support reconciliation in the divided nation. Now that the crisis is letting up a bit, the situation in Rwanda does not attract as much media and public attention as before. Still, long-term challenges like reconstruction, rehabilitation, and restoration of peace are just beginning to be met. We greatly appreciate your efforts to make known to others the work of the CCOOP in Rwanda, and we thank you."

PASTORAL MINISTRY STAFF

We are looking for a pastoral agent for social communications and high school religious education. Those who would be interested in eventually working in pastoral ministry at the diocesan level are asked to submit their 'curriculum vitae' before March 17 to the Coordinator of Pastoral Ministry (Centre Diocésain, Edmundston, N-B E3V 3K1). Interviews will be held in early April.

Have a good week - and a good Lent!



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

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