
UNFORGETTABLE GET-TOGETHERS



Whenever we talk to those who attended the historical World Acadian Congress last summer in southeastern New Brunswick, they are unanimous in saying that it was unforgettable. What with so few committees and provisional structures, who could have imagined the Congress success. We remember the mass gatherings like the official opening at Cap-Pelé, the Mass of the Assumption at Rogersville, the cultural conferences at the Université de Moncton, the 38 family reunions, the great gala event which was televised all over the world, the visit of the United Nations' Secretary General, etc.

SEE YOU NEXT WEEK!

In article [No. 56] I mentioned the extraordinary event which the first believers witnessed, that first Sunday, the first day of the week on which Jesus arose from the dead. It was such a great and unheard-of event that people began to gather together week after week... It is certain that the fact that the Acadian Reunion does not happen every week or every year confers to it a special festive character. But in reading over the writings of the first Christians, it seems that the weekly get-together kept all of its newness and interest. And these get-togethers often lasted long, even hours!

DON'T SIT IN THE WINDOW!

In the Acts of the Apostles, Saint Luke writes the following: "On the first day of the week, when we met to break bread, Paul was holding a discussion with them; since he intended to leave the next day, he continued speaking until midnight. There were many lamps in the room upstairs where they were meeting. A young man named Eutychus, who was sitting in the window, began to sink off into a deep sleep while Paul talked still longer. Overcome by sleep, he fell to the ground three floors below and was picked up dead. But Paul went down, and bending over him took him in his arms, and said, 'Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him.' Then Paul went upstairs, and after he had broken bread and eaten, he continued to converse with them until dawn, then he left. Meanwhile they had taken the boy away alive and were not a little comforted" (Acts 20:7-13).

1995 REUNIONS

In the course of twenty centuries, Christian "reunions" on the first day of the week have taken on different forms but the essential elements have always remained the same: to celebrate the Resurrection and proclaim our own. Our meeting places may differ from one period to another: humble country church, underground grotto, majestic cathedral, St. Peter's Square, unassuming parish church. The main thing is getting together, the basic thing is the gathering. The gathering used to take place around one or another of the apostles or their successors, the bishops; the importance of the Christian assembly was stressed, an assembly which gathered the people around their bishop and his presbyterium; the uniqueness of the weekly gathering was stressed. In the very beginning, gatherings were held in private homes, but as the groups became more and more numerous, these meetings were held in bigger houses called 'basilicas.'

WHERE TO MEET?

As the number of Christians continued to increase, more and more parishes had to be created, especially in the countryside, parishes that were usually given over to the charge of deacons who could not celebrate the Eucharist. When the bishop entrusted the priest with the care of those churches, these became the focal point of Sunday worship. The multiplication of rural parishes, from the fifth century on, raised a problem regarding the place where the faithful were obliged to participate in the Sunday Mass. For a long time the Church insisted that for major feasts and especially Easter, the faithful meet together at the episcopal church, the pre-eminent mother church. The parish church then became the compulsory meeting place of the Sunday assembly: it was to this parish church that the faithful had to go.

WITH OR WITHOUT THE EUCHARIST?

A quick glance down the centuries makes us realise that the different Christian groups did not always have the possibility of celebrating the Eucharist. Even today, groups and even entire parishes cannot do so, especially because of the lack of priests or distances to travel in order to join in a eucharistic celebration. Notwithstanding this, Christians still insist on gathering together, and this gathering carries with it a great significance: it manifests the people of God awaiting the glorious return of Christ; through the simple fact of gathering together, the community proclaims its faith in the Risen Christ. Many of our ancestors never experienced the possibility of celebrating the Eucharist every week. Still, families nonetheless underscored the importance of Sunday as a day of hope, and one of prayer and rest. There were also interfamily initiatives: they would exhibit their faith and hope together. Let's recall what used to take place in many lumber camps: even if there was no priest, one or another of the bosses or employees would take it upon himself to call the others to prayer. Already in our country, some parishes no longer have the possibility of having Sunday Mass, but it would really be too bad and lamentable if it were not possible to have a prayer and communion service. On June 2, 1988, the Congregation for Divine Worship published a *Directory for Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*: in it the Congregation stressed the importance for Christians to gather together to share the Word of God, to join in fellowship, and to receive Communion.

GRACE OF GATHERING TOGETHER

We are truly lucky - I don't think we say it often enough - that in our diocese we can meet every Sunday and live together the experience of the Eucharist. This is really a grace given to us, it is a gift of the Lord that allows us to gather together, join in fellowship, listen to the Word of God, and share in the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. It would take all eternity for us to thank God for such goodness!

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« From A Bishop's Journal » (058) (08 March 1995)