
MAY 8, 1995: A BIG DAY!



Throughout New Brunswick, this date will mark municipal and school board elections. Stakes are high in both fields, and so I hope, as pastor of this diocese, that you will participate in great numbers in these 1995 elections. And I deliberately make mine the instruction of St. Paul that "we pray for all those in authority." To present oneself for elections or to vote can be saying to others, "Let us not love in word only, but in deed," as St. John says. It isn't easy today to hold office in a municipality or a school board, nor is it easy to create new forms of relationships. Twenty-five years ago, in writing on *Christians in the City*, Pope Paul VI had these words: "To concretely apply social justice, to become involved in the collective future of a community, are tasks in which Christians must be involved. We must bring the message of hope and solidarity to men and women through real brotherhood and concrete justice." The Pope's teaching can help our reflection for greater daily social commitment. The Pope's most important text on the question was his letter addressed to Cardinal Maurice Roy, entitled *Octogesima adveniens*. Social pastoral ministry offices have adapted the text to municipal elections. The following are reflections based on this text.

ELECTIONS BY ACCLAMATION

It happens quite often that candidates are elected by acclamation. It could be that the candidates are very competent, in which case we must heartily rejoice; but we must examine such a situation very closely. It could very well be a sign that the citizens do not want to take on their own responsibilities. It could be that the population as a whole is indifferent to these elections: this would be too bad. And there is also the possibility that there is an organised group that does not renew itself sufficiently.

CONCRETE CHALLENGES OF MUNICIPAL ADMINISTRATION

It isn't easy to respond to all challenges made to municipal administrators, in this period of prolonged economic recession it isn't easy: to have the population participate in the decision-making and keep it informed of results obtained, to administer the public purse in a healthy way while taking into account the social costs of services and revising the system of taxation, to make available to the entire population recreation centres and green spaces, to tackle housing and transportation problems, to respect the municipality's cultural heritage, to protect the environment by fighting pollution, to give quality service, etc. To all those who have taken up the challenge or who are preparing to take it up next month, we offer our gratitude and solidarity.

THE RESPONSIBLE ADMINISTRATOR

It is difficult nowadays to adequately respond to a population's different expectations: to have the competency required for the job along with a sense of responsibility, to take into consideration the population as a whole, to provide for measures to be taken to meet the basic needs of the community through a coherent programme, to search together for solutions, to keep in touch with others, to transmit correct information, to preoccupy oneself with the municipality's human aspect, to remain attentive to the needs of the have-nots, to develop a sense of belonging and civic pride among the population, etc. Priorities must be set in each community according to available financial and personal resources.

MARKED BY CO-RESPONSIBILITY

If it is responsible administration and administrators that we want, it is important that the citizenry be mutually responsible with those elected to office and this, in different aspects: by showing interest in the electoral process, by participating in the choice of candidates, by becoming involved in sensitising the community to the needs of the publicly assisted, by being aware that in voting for a particular candidate we give that person power over the common good, by encouraging the municipal authorities, by ensuring that the good of the population as a whole takes precedence over personal interests, by seeking social justice and peace, by voting for candidates who are up to the actual challenges of municipal administration, etc. It is an entire network of solidarity and co-responsibility that can be created or reinforced, in municipal elections.

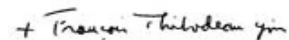
UNDER THE SIGN OF DEMOCRACY

Transparency is required more and more, in municipal administration, as well as in Church administration. Municipal administration must continuously manifest this openness. In this way, delicate questions can be asked: What are you doing about your promises and the realisations of the actual administration? Is the trust you have or don't have in those involved in the present campaign based on solid motives? How was the choice of candidates for mayor and counsellors made? Is the population usually consulted by the municipal administration? Does the population participate in the political life of the municipality? Is the population informed of decisions to be made and of results obtained? Are you able to involve one of your friends or relatives in three important problems of your municipality? Etc.

JOYS AND HOPES

I want this reflection which is offered you to be without any partisan spirit. My only desire is to stress the importance of all voting. This gesture has consequences for a municipality as a whole, whether we like it or not. It is within municipal life that can be promoted or not authentic democracy. Allow me here to quote from one of the beautiful texts of Vatican Council II, the *Apostolic Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, on which I base this pastoral intervention: "The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts... Christians cherish a feeling of deep solidarity with the human race and its history." And in continuity with the Church's Good Friday prayer, I invite you once more to pray for the heads of states and for all who are responsible for public affairs, that the Lord guide their spirit and their heart according to his will for peace and freedom for everyone.

Have a good week!



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