
A THOUSAND THANKS!



I lack the words to express my gratitude to God for everything beautiful and grand that occurred in the course of the seventeenth *Foire Brayonne* and all that marked the fiftieth anniversary of our diocesan Church. It is truly just and right that we should bless the Lord without ceasing for so many marvels, so much devotedness, so much generosity. Thank You to all those who made the important activities possible. On Sunday, August 13, it will be possible for us to relive a few moments of these unforgettable days by watching on the Radio-Canada network the *Jour du Seigneur* programme [televised Mass] feature the Edmundston festivities. It was with great joy that I welcomed hundreds and hundreds of visitors - especially my fellow-bishops from the Atlantic and Québec provinces - and in the course of these days, people who came to experience moments of gratitude.

HOMILY FOR THE *MESSE BRAYONNE*

"On this day when we celebrate the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, it is good to proclaim, bless and glorify the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit for the marvels they wrought in this humble woman of Nazareth who was chosen to become mother of our Redeemer. Let us join together in Mary's prayer which we have just heard. Yes, let us repeat the Lord has done great things in her and that *his love is from age to age*.

Our predecessors had a special devotion to the mother of Jesus. If you travel across the Maritime Provinces you will be amazed at the number of parishes and shrines dedicated to the Virgin. Here [in New Brunswick], our entire diocese is dedicated to Mary, the Immaculate Conception; over one third of our parishes are dedicated to her, and more than half of the religious communities that worked or still work in our diocese are consecrated to the Virgin Mary.

We acknowledge that Mary was grace-filled from the moment of her conception to her assumption into heaven; we acknowledge that the Lord has done great things in her, and with her we recognise that his love is from age to age. I invite you all to join in Mary's prayer in recognising all the marvels which God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit has been pleased to accomplish in our midst, and this, not only since the fifty years of our diocese, but well beyond.

It is interesting to note that since the coming to New France in 1659 of Bishop François de Montmorency Laval, the first North-American bishop, the people of our region were under the charge, successively, of the bishops of Québec, Charlottetown, Fredericton, Saint John, Chatham, and Bathurst. The first bishop to tread our soil was Bishop de Saint-Vallier, in 1686: a commemorative plaque by the falls in Grand Falls recalls this event.

Our diocesan flag also reminds us of God's love which is from age to age. It is a hymn to the Blessed Trinity: let us let our eyes often rest on this flag of ours, let us take pride in it. "*Filled with the Lord's blessings, we proclaim to the whole world: His love is from age to age.*"

As we gaze at the first part of the flag we thank the Father for the beautiful work of creation that He has given over to our care, in Madawaska County, the Restigouche, and Victoria County. Spring, summer, fall and winter, the beauties of this creation are awesome: forest and rivers, mountains and valleys move us to gratitude. We are proud of Mont Farlagne, of the Saint John River, of the Tobique River where our Maliseet brothers and sisters have their homes. We are proud of the Restigouche and Quisibis rivers. We are proud of its warm and friendly population.

The star shining over the hills [on the diocesan coat of arms, on the flag] reminds us of the kindly presence of the Virgin Mary. *"God the Father does great things by giving us the heavens, the earth and the sun; He hands over to us forest, earth and sea: that is our garden."*

As we look at the second part of the flag we give thanks to God the Son: for centuries now the Christian faith has been proclaimed among us, and God's love was gratefully received by our families. We have gratefully welcomed the Gospel of Jesus as a precious heritage to be more and more unfolded before our eyes, a heritage to be assimilated, shared, and celebrated. Following the Diocesan Synod which took place between 1987 and 1990 under the direction of my predecessor, our first priority has been to rediscover the Gospel of Jesus, to rediscover what we become through Baptism. This Christian renewal is a source of hope for the forthcoming years. The presence of those baptised or confirmed in 1944-1945 reminds us how much God's love is from age to age. *"God the Son does great things: He gives meaning to our lives, he makes himself poor among His people, and He lives in our midst."*

The waters [represented on the coat of arms] remind us of the running waters of our rivers that range from light rapids to grand falls, but in the Church context, they are a reminder of the waters of grace, the water of Baptism.

In replicating in a stylistic manner on our flag the flag ship that is on the New Brunswick flag, we wish to pay special homage to God the Holy Spirit. He is the one who gives life to the Church which we form; God's love has been placed in our hearts thanks to the Holy Spirit who was given to us. The ship represents the Church that we are; we even used it as a mascot for our festivities. Our vessel is much more than a living thing, it is what we are as a Church: we are the ship that must sail out to sea with daring and courage. *"The Holy Spirit does great things: He changes our hearts, builds a new world, model of the Kingdom."*

As you can see, the Lord continues to do great things, and from the depth of our hearts we join the Immaculate Virgin, the Virgin of the Assumption, in repeating the *Magnificat*, [her song of praise]. *"If love does great things, let us live this love, let us live of God. Since the Eternal is in our hearts, let us transform our world."*

YOUTH RALLY

Don't forget the 1995 Youth Rally that is to take place from Saturday, August 12 to Sunday, August 13, twenty-four hours of fellowship and deep sharing.

Have a good week.

+ François Thibodeau

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

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