
NOW IS THE ACCEPTABLE TIME!



On this February 21 a period begins that good will be quite extraordinary: I am referring to the season of Lent, this period of time during which we can grow in solidarity and in depth. A period of prayer and recollection, a time of covenant and reconciliation. This period is like a journeying to Easter, not a time when we accomplish more but one during which we do differently. As a matter of fact, this is what a time of conversion is: to always live more and more in the way that Jesus lived. I hope that the 1996 Lenten resolutions are very simple, but all the more in conformity with the desire of Jesus, to aid one's neighbour, to take a few moments of silence, never to retire at night in a state of anger, to reconcile oneself with a family member or a relative, to join in the Sunday eucharistic celebration, to meditate on God's word, to speak well of one's neighbours, etc. May this Lent be most beneficial to us.

LENT IN THE RESTIGOUCHE

For my part, I shall be spending a good part of the Lenten season in the Restigouche Deanery. Since the word 'Lent' refers to a forty-day period, and I shall be spending some fifteen days in the deanery, it means that I shall be spending more than one-third of my Lent in the beautiful Restigouche country. This will be a magnificent grace for me, because I shall be undertaking the pastoral visit of the deanery's four parishes: St-Quentin (February 23-25), Kedgwick (February 29-March 3), St-Jean-Baptiste (March 8-10), and St-martin (March 15-17). Since the Lenten theme this year calls on us to look at our human journeys as those of God, I shall be treading most important and sacred pathways: Hour after hour I shall be meeting new groups and organisations, youth and elders, the sick and the healthy, workers and unemployed, and new committees, all of which illustrate an entire population's vitality.

PASTORAL VISITATION

At the time of my episcopal ordination on January 9, 1994 I had stated that one of my most cherished desires, after a first contact with all the diocese's parishes, was to experience an intensive visit in each milieu. "Apostolic work, Event of Grace," this is how the *Directory for Bishops* describes the pastoral visitation. The Directory presents the visitation as a special way which the bishop has to personally meet with his clergy and the other people of God in order to get to know, guide, and exhort them to faithfully live the Christian life, and to see for himself whether the pastoral ministry structures and resources are truly effective. It is not the object of a pastoral visitation to control and/or judge the work of pastors and the vitality of Christian communities visited; it isn't meant to be the visit of a public works director or a comptroller of finance. It is, rather, a tool to help the first pastor of the diocesan Church aid, comfort, and encourage pastors and other faithful in their following Christ. It is an opportunity for a common search for the most appropriate methods to announce the Good News of Jesus. *"Its object is the renewal of vitality of the Church's communities and institutions."*

BASIC ATTITUDES

Pastoral charity is, so to speak, the very soul of the visitation: charity of the bishop who truly lends himself to listening to pastors and the other faithful, who tries to find words and ways to encourage and enliven their hope; charity of the Christian people that trustfully welcome their pastor with openness, without attempting to hide or falsely

impress. During this visitation, the bishop is called to live closely with women and men who are rooted in a particular history, culture, and territory. Like the Good Shepherd, he is invited to listen to the aspirations of the people given over to his care, and to lead them to God. Through his pastoral presence, the bishop awakens and develops a thirst for God in the hearts of those who are his people. Like Jesus who went from village to village preaching the Good News, the bishop visits every parish of his diocese in order to recognise the work of God in God's Word and sacraments.

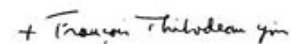
A STIMULATING PROGRAMME

During his pastoral visitation the bishop nourishes the faith of his people. He prays for them and with them, he visits the sick, youth, and the elderly. He meets with workers and managers, and with those who have responsibilities within the Christian community. They celebrate the sacraments together, especially Baptism and Confirmation, and they welcome the Word of God. I invite you to pray that these pastoral visitations become for everyone in the community a special moment of prayer and sharing for a deeper commitment to follow Jesus Christ. Following these visits, I plan on reporting to you on what I will have experienced with my brothers and sisters of the Restigouche Deanery.

SHARE LENT

As usual, I invite to experience as deeply as possible the Share Lent programme sponsored by Development and Peace on behalf of our Third World brothers and sisters. *"For a better world, your donation makes a difference."* The generous support of Catholics has allowed the Canadian Church, through a mandate given to Development and Peace by the bishops in 1967, to take on an active part in the efforts made to find just and peaceful solution to problems that are exacerbated with globalisation of the economy. According to your outstanding generosity, may this 1996 Lenten season make the Kingdom of God even more present among us.

Have a fruitful Lent!



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

« From A Bishop's Journal » (108) (21 February 1996)