
A PROFOUND GRATITUDE TO WOMEN



Friday, March 8 will mark International Woman's Day, and in the name of the Diocese of Edmundston I want to express my profound gratitude to the 30,000 or so women of the diocese, for all they are and all they do, whether it be at home, at work, in the schools, the parish, the Diocesan Centre, or the public or private sectors. I do not forget those who are ill: may they continue to edify us by their patience and great spirit of faith. And since on that day I shall be beginning an intensive pastoral visitation in St-Jean-Baptiste, all the women of the Restigouche are invited, along with their pastor and pastoral agents, to a meeting to be held in the St-Jean-Baptiste parish hall from 4:00 to 7:00 P.M., which will include a celebration of the Eucharist, a supper-meeting, and fellowship.

LANDMARK PRECEDENTS

Faced with today's challenges to ensure that relations between men and women be always steeped in justice and fairness, some people might despair at the present situation. Still, by taking a quick look at the challenges that were picked up by those who came before us, we can discern in their actions an ever new dynamism, one that is susceptible to raise our hopes. Along these lines, I am reminded of the three Ursuline and three Augustinian nuns who came to New France in 1639 to establish a school and a hospital; they were to become the first women missionaries in the history of humankind, and they can still be an inspiration to us today. I am reminded also of Marie-Catherine de St-Augustin who left France at the age of 16 to consecrate the last twenty years of her life to the care of the sick. I am reminded of Jeanne Mance and Marguerite Bourgeoys, of the Religious Hospitallers of St. Joseph by a doctor and family man named Jerome LeRoyer de la Dauversière. I am reminded of Marie Gérin-Lajoie who founded a community committed to looking after the social needs of her time; and of Délia Tétreault who founds a community of missionary sisters to respond to needs in foreign lands.

WOMAN TAKEN UP WITH JUSTICE ISSUES

Whether out West or in the eastern section of our country, the same zeal can be found. Think of those religious communities who were totally involved in charitable works; and all those mothers who established for their own an outstanding place of life and faith. I am reminded of Jeanne Sauvé and Pauline Vanier who, in the name of their faith rooted in Catholic Action movements, opened up new horizons in the political field. I am reminded of Suzanne Cyr - Mother Marie-Anne - foundress of the Sisters of Notre-Dame du Sacré-Coeur, and of Mother Jeanne-de-Valois, foundress of Notre-Dame d'Acadie College; of the Filles de Marie de l'Assomption, who also were deeply concerned with education; I am reminded of Alphonsine Ranger, Mother Mailliet of St-Basile, Sister Rhéa Larose, and all those other Religious Hospitallers of St. Joseph who accomplished a gigantic task, among us. I am reminded of all these women who have worked and continue to work for the welfare and education of their loved ones. I recall those women who give the best of themselves in service to parish organisations and social movements.

IN DIFFICULT TIMES

At the crossroads of life, we still encounter these women who are so filled with courage and creativeness, witnessing to Christ through word and example, in the midst of their families, their social group and their professional milieu. And this reminds me of the Vatican II declaration on the missionary activity of the Church:

"The Church is not truly established and does not fully live, nor is it a perfect sign of Christ unless there is a genuine laity existing and working alongside the hierarchy. For the Gospel cannot become deeply rooted in the mentality, life and work of a people without the active presence of lay people." And the Council fathers continued: "The lay faithful belong fully both to the people of God and civil society. They belong to the nation into which they were born, they begin to share in its cultural riches by their education, they are linked to its life by many social ties, they contribute to its progress by personal effort in their professions, they feel its problems to be their own and they try to solve them. They belong also to Christ because by faith and baptism they have been reborn in the Church, so that by newness of life and work they might belong to Christ, in order that all things might be subjected to God in Christ and that God might be all in all."

NEW CHALLENGES

Allow me to pay special tribute to these women among us who are involved in the faith education of our children and adults, whether at home, in school, in the parish, etc. By their behaviour and attitude, by sharing their deepest values, they offer a renewed vision of our society and our Church. By their zeal, persistence, and creativity they help in deepening further so as to better share the precious heritage of our faith, hope, and charity. I can only wish that this keep on growing and increasing, whether it be among our youth, the elderly, the sick, the workers, or the unemployed. May we together look more closely at everything that affects the socio-economic condition of women and that contributes to the impoverishment of several among them. Let us consider all those who will be called to take up the task in the future, in the social, cultural, economic, political, and religious arenas. These young girls of today will be among the leaders of tomorrow. I have met a few of them, and they inspire hope and stimulus for tomorrow.

Have a good International Day!

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