
ST-JEAN-BAPTISTE: A HOPE-FILLED PEOPLE!



On March 8, 9, and 10 I had the pleasure of making a first extended pastoral visitation to St-Jean-Baptiste parish, in the Restigouche. It is a village located some 20 kilometres north of Kedgwick and 45 kilometres south of Campbellton; it has the distinction of being the highest village in the province of New Brunswick, situated as it is 337 metres (1210 feet) above sea level. The Christian community there is composed of some 350 people grouped in 115 families. Despite the difficult extended economic recession, despite also the closing of a number of services in their milieu, I found a people full of hope and proud of their history and their milieu, proud also of the marvelous forest resources located there, and hopeful that shortly exploitation of one of the most promising copper mines in the province and located in the area will begin.

GRATITUDE TO THE FILLES DE MARIE-DE-L'ASSOMPTION

It wasn't without reason that right in the middle of my visitation I went to Campbellton to meet with Sister Julie D'Amour, superior general of the Filles de Marie-de-l'Assomption, in order to thank her on behalf of our diocesan Church for the inestimable help that her sisters are bringing to the diocese of Edmundston, especially in the Restigouche, Edmundston, and Grand Falls Deaneries. Founded in 1924 by Father Arthur Melanson, pastor at Balmoral, initiator of the parishes of St-Quentin and Kedgwick, first Archbishop of Moncton, and by Bishop Patrice-Alexandre Chiasson, C.J.M., the Filles de Marie-de-l'Assomption have been working in our diocese since 1924, the convent at St-Quentin being the first house opened by the community outside of Campbellton; the convent has since become the Résidence Morneault. Since 1987, the F.M.A. have had the responsibility of St-Jean-Baptiste Parish, succeeding Fathers Camille Côté, Armand Labrie, Arthur Rossignol, Jacques Gauvreau, and Enoïl Thériault, priests of the diocese, and Eudist Fathers Moïse Arsenault and Raymond Melanson. Following in the footsteps of Sisters Albertine Cormier, Mériilda Légère, and Gilberte Cormier, Sisters Alberte Gallant and Viola Côté are the new pastoral agents in charge of the parish, with Father Pierre Thibodeau in charge of eucharistic celebrations. The prayer room walls in the rectory are decorated with Marian scenes, one of the Annunciation and the other, of the Visitation to Elizabeth: indications of the deep spirituality animating a community whose only wish is to do in all things the will of God and reach out to others, as Mary did.

WOMEN OF HOPE

Despite the bad weather, over forty women gathered together in St-Jean-Baptiste on the occasion of the International Women's Day, March 8, in order to deepen their understanding of the role of women in the Church. One of the hymns emphasised that mission: « Let us be women of hope; we are needed by the Father to carry the flame that blazed forth from the heart of God. Let us be women of hope in a world that needs us to have praises to Him break out like a leaven of unity. Let us be women of hope: Jesus needs us for his mission that gathers us together and makes us shepherds to one another. »

LINKS OF FRIENDSHIP AND HOPE

On the evening of March 8, over forty people representing 25 local organisations and committees accepted the invitation to meet with me. I found among them a great sense of fellowship and enthusiasm, marked with the

signs of service, pride in their organisation, and desire to serve. These groups were the Association du Patrimoine, the food bank, the St-Quentin Library, Cadets, Winter Carnival, the St-Martin youth group Cellule Jeunesse, Chamber of Commerce, snowmobile club, Bingo Committee, Citizens Committee, Liturgy Committee, Senior Citizens Complex, Cursillo, Dames d'Acadie, Development and Peace, the Femmes Chrétiennes Movement, the Western Music Festival, Daughters of Isabella, Literacy Group, Canadian Legion, the Vie Montante senior citizens group, and the Volontaires de Dieu group: a world of fellowship and service. It was a meeting of great benefit for a better knowledge of one another for collaborating together to the milieu's welfare.

AT THE SERVICE OF THE WORD AND THE COMMUNITY

On March 9 and 10, after meeting with, I had the pleasure of visiting the homes of a few sick and elderly people, with the [Knights of Columbus] District Deputy. Such visits are to me like a pilgrimage where the paths of the world are also those of Christ. After a meeting with the Knights of Columbus and their spouses, I had the opportunity to reflect with the pastoral council on the mission of this necessary parish organisation. At the Sunday celebration I had the joy of confirming a young lady from St-Jean-Baptiste and to present to the parish community the ministers of communion, the members of the Pastoral Council and those of the Economic Affairs Committee. A community luncheon followed the celebration, after which I baptised a baby and had the joy of bringing him into the Christian community. There followed a final meeting with the members of the parish Bingo Committee, to thank them for their financial support of the parish. And this brought my pastoral visit to an end.

A HIDDEN TREASURE

The simplicity, charity, and mutual help exhibited by this community are truly sources of hope. This is where, it seems to me, the community holds the treasure in its heart. It is on the love we have for one another that others will know us as disciples of Christ.

+ François Thibodeau

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