
BENEFICIAL SPIRITUAL MOMENTS



It is probably a bit early to draw a spiritual balance sheet of the summer months. The many events that took place during the past few weeks can help us grow in faith, hope, and love.

NOVENAS AND FEAST DAYS

At this time when the novena preparatory to the great feast of the Assumption is in full swing, we can assert that these times of prayer, like those of the novena to St. Ann, comprise periods that are remarkable as moments of spiritual renewal. The feast of the Assumption is a favourable time to rekindle our hope. This young woman from Nazareth who became the mother of Jesus and who was raised into the glory of heaven is the very sign of the great things that God can do in every human being and for all His people. « He has looked down upon his lowly servant. Henceforth all nations will call me blessed. The Almighty has done great things for me. *His love is from age to age.* » Novenas and feast day celebrations in honour of St. Ann and Our lady of the Assumption can mark our personal and community life. Thanks to our forebears and our compatriots, our parents, teachers, and pastors for having found a place in summertime for times rich in devotion and in holiness.

AN UNFORGETTABLE FORTY HOURS

For my part I shall long remember the unforgettable hours spent at Sainte-Anne-de-Beaupré, July 25 and 26. At the invitation of the directors of this memorable shrine I presided the first vespers of the feast of St. Ann, in this way marking the beginning of the great festivities. I also presided the July 25 solemn eucharist. On the feast day itself - July 26 - and according to the tradition, Archbishop Maurice Couture of Québec, presided the mass in honour of St. Ann; over 5000 people packed the basilica. In the afternoon I presided the celebration of the sacrament of the sick. How great this sacrament is which reveals to us the tenderness and compassion of God, as well as the presence of Jesus among those who suffer. How great was the faith of these people who came from all over the country, as well as from the United States and Europe. After the evening mass that once more drew over five thousand people, the impressive candlelight procession was held along the mountain path, where for over an hour and a half we prayed together for our brothers and sisters. At these festivities I made a point of announcing that in 1997 we shall be celebrating the one hundred twenty-fifth anniversary of our diocesan shrine at Sainte-Anne-de-Madawaska.

THE PRESENCE OF YOUTH

One of the things that touched me the most at this pilgrimage was the great proportion of youth, young people with whom we shared the same faith and hope, young people who showed a deep sense of true prayer; young couples seeking the protection of St. Ann for their married life, young physically handicapped people wanting to live deeply their human adventure; young people taking part in the organisation of pilgrimages and their different liturgical functions; young people examining themselves on their vocation, today and tomorrow. Young Redemptorists - they were 8 - who preached the novena on the topic « You Are Valuable to Me. » In this three hundredth anniversary of the birth of St. Alphonsus Liguori, their founder, and the one hundredth anniversary of the death of the venerated Father Pampalon, these young preachers shared the Word of God with power and conviction, a reminder that « the heart of man and woman is God's paradise. »

PRESENCE TO VICTIMS OF DISASTERS

Right at the first vespers of the feast of St. Ann, a tangible gesture was made on behalf of the victims of the Saguenay and the St. Lawrence River north shore flooded regions. At each prayer service specific mention was made of them, and we faithfully exhibited our solidarity. At the St. Ann Shrine I had the opportunity to meet a young family that had lost everything to the flood, but who came with faith and devotion to seek further graces in order to live through this difficult period. I was pleased to learn that instead of setting up independent solidarity networks the parishes and associations joined forces with the Red Cross in order to respond to the many needs of the disaster victims. Bishop Jean-Guy Couture of Chicoutimi, with whom I had the pleasure of working for five years, leads this great movement of solidarity and charity.

FAMILY PRESENCE

Throughout the time I spent at St. Ann I was able to perceive the fundamental vitality of our families. It is extraordinary, what a grandmother like St. Ann can accomplish within the family! Our native brothers and sisters often remind us of the major importance of grandparents in our lives. All we need do is remember the beautiful canvas of St. Ann, in the Maliseet church, depicting the grandmother with her daughter Mary at the time of the birth of her grandson Jesus. I marvel at everything grandmothers and grandfathers can daily accomplish in the lives of their children and grandchildren: discreet witnesses of family events such as births, baptisms, and weddings, the unconditional acceptance of their children and their partners, daily prayer for their family, and generous help on a day-to-day basis.

AN EVALUATION TO PURSUE

I hope that this reflection will motivate us to evaluate our summer. I am certain that you will be surprised at all you experienced that was beautiful and holy, in your milieu. And you will catch yourself meditating on these words of the liturgy for the feast of St. Ann: « Happy the eyes that see what you see, and the ears that hear what you hear. » Have a good week!

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