
THE AUGUST FIFTEENTH CALLS



Following the Acadian national holiday I want to proudly indicate, but with not bragging, the ties that bind me to the Acadian people: family ties, ties with my religious congregation, and ties with the episcopacy. It was in 1654 that the first Thibodeau in North America, the ancestor Pierre Thibodeau, settled in Port Royal. A monument to his memory has been erected at the Pré-Ronde. A builder of houses, mills, and a chapel, he obtained in 1699 the title of Seigneur of Chipoudy. In 1890 the first Eudist Fathers arrived from France to settle in Baie-Sainte-Marie and founded St. Anne College, later to become St. Anne University, the only francophone university in Nova Scotia. It is from there that the Congregation Of Jesus and Mary spread across North America. And it was on October 20, 1993 that His Holiness Pope John Paul II appointed me bishop of the beloved Church of Edmundston, a Church closely connected to the other Atlantic dioceses, especially those of Moncton, Bathurst, and Yarmouth.

A SACRED HISTORY

It will soon be 400 years that the Acadian people came into existence. In 1604 Samuel de Champlain arrived at Port Royal and established the first establishments of these courageous pioneers. Overcome by the beauty of these newly-discovered lands, these founders took advantage of the beautiful nature that surrounded them. The remarkable canvasses of artist Claude Picard of St. Basile and exhibited in the Grand Pré memorial church underscore the beauty of these fertile lands and the fruitfulness of these immense maritime expanses. These pioneers had to work very hard but they were supported in their task by a boundless faith and hope. « Lord, how beautiful are your works, how great are your works, you fill us with joy, your people is a sacred history. » Picard's canvasses also depict the atrocity of the Acadian deportation of 1755, which would today be described as attempted genocide. Deported to Europe, Canada, and the United States, these Acadians struggled with unmatched resistance and endurance. After many years' exile, a number of Acadians made their way back to their country of origin. The renowned author Antonine Maillet is right in employing the salmon comparison to stress the importance of returning to one's source as to the root of one's vital energy. The salmon would become denatured if it did not return to its place of birth. Still, it must struggle against tides and winds, swim against the current, with all that this entails in courage and persistence, to reach its place of origin. The same can be said of the Acadians. Several of Antonine Maillet's thirty-four books deal with a return to the source, especially *Pélagie la Charette*, the *Confessions* of Mother Jeanne de Valois, and the ever popular *La Sagouine*. Parents, teachers, priests, religious, and professionals of every stripe worked together at restructuring a people that could not be destroyed. The Church has constantly strongly supported this people that had such a will to live.

IRRESISTIBLE CALLS

In 1990, when the Eudists celebrated the centennial of their presence in North America, I composed a song entitled « The Calls of August 15 » I wrote this with the Eudists especially in mind, but I would like, here, to pay tribute to the Holy Cross Fathers and Brothers who founded St. Joseph College in Memramcook. Few religious congregations came to settle down in the Maritimes except the Holy Cross and the Eudist Fathers. I also want to pay tribute to the Sisters of Notre-Dame-du Sacré-Coeur who founded Notre-Dame-D'Acadie College and the Filles de Marie-de-l'Assomption Sisters, both of whom have been working among us for 75 years and more. I want to pay tribute to all educators, teachers, and professors who have done so much, in humility and often in impoverishment, in the cause of education. It is in the wake of these establishments that St. Louis College in Edmundston was established in 1946. « One day in Baie-Ste-Marie, cradle of Acadia, two Eudist

priests arriving from France, Fathers Blanche and Morin, answered the August fifteenth call. » It was on August 15, 1890, at the Third Acadian Convention held at Pointe-de-L'Église in Nova Scotia, that it was instantly recommended that a francophone college be established in the region, and it was there that the first Eudists settled down. «Through trial, failure, and disruption, hope was eventually established. The resourceful people of the region responded wholeheartedly to the August fifteenth call. »

NEW CALLS

« Here are new missionaries going across the country, proclaiming the Gospel, forcefully responding to the August fifteenth call. And the growing tree and its burgeoning branches are still reaching across America and you, young people and old, do you too undertake the August fifteenth journey? » The years of renewal were now living in our respective milieus offer their own challenges, but these are as big and demanding as those given to our forebears. These Acadians were baptised Catholics for the most part. Missionary priests, few in number, accompanied them throughout their wanderings. Their faith, language, and culture constituted important indispensable elements in moulding them into one people. Numerous hardy families struggled on a daily basis for survival, oftentimes in poverty and even in destitution. People of deep convictions and abiding values. As we get closer to the year 2004 we need even more to develop a firm faith, unwavering hope, and boundless charity. our forebears can still teach us the sense of history, the constant presence of God within our livers; they can remind us of the values of solidarity and generosity, values that can continue on. We must rediscover for ourselves - even if under new forms, whether in the cultural, social, economic, political, and sports areas - the priceless value of our baptism and confirmation, rediscover the meaning of History and of the Church's mission in our own time, and take upon the challenge to pursue the task undertaken. These August fifteenth calls are specific, they are calls to a more lively faith, a more fervent hope, an unceasing charity, and a stronger boldness.

+ François Thibodeau

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

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