
WHY HAVE YOU TOLD ME TO LOVE?



I am filled with awe at the acts of solidarity in our milieu, and it is with the prayer of Michel Quoist in mind that I write these lines. Every day I can experience for myself the generosity of our people: no one remains cold to the crying needs of our milieu, our country, or the world at large.

SOLIDARITY CARAVAN

The day following the Saguenay, Québec catastrophe, July 20, I was challenged by all those who had lost everything to that great flood. On July 25, at the shrine of Ste-Anne-de-Beaupré, eyewitnesses described to me the extent of the catastrophe. The following day I met a family that had lost all their possessions and who had come to implore from St. Ann an increase in faith and courage to overcome such a tragedy. On August 8 I went to Chicoutimi for the funeral of my confrère Father Roland Tremblay, C.J.M., pastor of Sacré-Cœur Parish; the events of the last few weeks had proven too much for him and he was not able to overcome the stress caused by the event. I saw for myself those places and buildings that seemed to be coming out of a war movie - I remember especially the house of Mrs. Genest which was a symbol of courage and tenacity. On August 15, at the Mass of the Assumption, Mr. Jacques Martin, president of the Francophone Municipalities of New Brunswick, informed me that a Solidarity Caravan was passing throughout the province, from east to west. In the following days the project reached incredible proportions. It was with heartfelt emotion that in the afternoon of September 5 I assisted at the caravan's departure for the Saguenay, four trailer trucks from Midland Transport, while the bell of the St. Basile church pealed and the motorists honked their send-off.

« WHAT DOES THIS REMIND YOU OF? »

As a radio host was asking me what this operation reminded me of, another asked, « Doesn't this remind you of the multiplication of the loaves? » And so it did: donations had multiplied thanks to the initiative of the AFNBM and of its president, the collaboration of the media, the generosity of our citizens, and the volunteer work of hundreds of firefighters who gave of their time to get and sort all that was donated. I could once more see for myself the goodness of our people, and appreciate their compassion for their neighbours in distress. On Friday, September 6, in the company of Mr. Jacques Martin and three other journalists of our region, I returned to Chicoutimi after having silently looked on all that had been achieved at Anse Saint-Jean and Ville La Baie... Bishop Jean-Guy Couture of Chicoutimi, chairman of the Gift of Solidarity Campaign, expressed how much he appreciated our gift and our visit: « You could very well have sent us this material by regular transport, but you came in person to visit us, and this makes all the difference. » A personalised gift, a friend's visit in the midst of hardship, human bonds forever strengthened. A meeting with the Québec Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, the mayor of Chicoutimi, representatives of the town of Jonquière and La Baie, and with the director of the St. Vincent de Paul Society allowed all of these to express their gratitude for our donations. During a visit we make to the warehouses where furniture, bedding, and electrical appliances were temporarily stored, we were told that everything that was stored here would be distributed to the most needy disaster victims within forty-eight hours. One of the volunteers tugged at my arm to show me the corner where children's toys were piling up: « The children mustn't be traumatised by the disaster », she said.

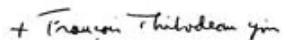
A LINK

I pass on grateful thanks to all who came to the aid of the Saguenay, North Shore, and Upper Mauricie regions, thanks for the financial assistance made available through credit unions and banks, for all the goods and materials you furnished, and for all the messages of solidarity you sent. For myself, I congratulate and thank all those who made this friendship and solidarity Caravan a reality, especially the officials of the AFNBM, of municipalities and parishes, the generous donors, the journalists, and the Irving Company officials. This solidarity initiative is certainly a fertile ground for friendship, compassion, and kindness. Let me add that at the episcopal ordination of the first bishop of Edmundston, on August 15, 1945, the apostolic delegate stated: « Because of its geographic position, the diocese of Edmundston is called to play an important role in the religious, cultural, and social relations of two illustrious provinces. A link between Acadia and the province of Québec, your diocese must further strengthen the bonds uniting them... for a friendly working atmosphere and productive mutual understanding. » Prophetic words that we are pleased to remember, as we consider our brotherly gesture. Thank you to my brothers and sisters of the province of New Brunswick.

ONGOING SOLIDARITY

Causes for solidarity are not lacking: every day, every week, requests for help don't stop coming in, both from our own people and from the outside... « Lord, why have you told me to love all of my brothers and sisters? You have forced me to open the door a bit. Like a gust of rain hitting me full force, the cry of others has awakened me; like the wind in a storm, a friendship has shaken me; like the sun's rays that sneak in after the tempest, your grace has troubled me... The former came into my home: there was still a bit of room left in my heart. But the others, Lord, I hadn't seen them, they were hidden by the former, but these last were more numerous, they were needier, and they overwhelmed me without warning... There is no more room for me in my home... Do not fear, says God, you have gained everything. Because while these were entering your home I, your Father, your God, I slipped in among them. »

In solidarity,



+ François Thibodeau, C.J.M.

Bishop of Edmundston

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