
LIFE IS SPROUTING UP EVERYWHERE



This coming Sunday will mark our diocese's patronal feast, and it is good that a number of parishes have prepared a fitting celebration of the feast of the Immaculate Conception. In the evening of this day the Bishop M.-A. Roy Prize will be awarded at Clair. The list of nominations indicates that throughout the diocese there is vitality and an energetic life of which we can be justly proud. Your abiding interest in our Church was shown once more on the occasion of the collection for the diocesan Church and at the Open House on the occasion of the Diocesan Centre's 25th anniversary. I thank you and congratulate you.

CONGRATULATIONS, ARCHBISHOP LÉGER!

On my behalf and that of our diocesan Church I most heartily congratulate Msgr. Ernest Léger who was appointed Archbishop of Moncton by His Holiness Pope John Paul II, as successor to archbishop Donat Chiasson. Coming as it does so close to Christmas and to the year 2000, this appointment is a beautiful gift to the Moncton Archdiocese as well as to all the Church of the Atlantic. I wish him much happiness in his new ministry: may he be for all a messenger of the joy of Jesus Christ.

SOCIAL JUSTICE MINISTRY SEMINAR

The Pontifical Council Cor Unum and the Latin American Bishops' Conference (CELAM) held a joint seminar in Bogotá, Colombia, last November 18 to 24; the topic was social and charitable pastoral ministry, as a preparation for the Synod of Bishops for America and the Year of Charity (1999). The chairmen and executive directors of the episcopal social affairs commissions from 24 American conferences of bishops were present, that is, with the exception of the United States and Argentina. Joe Gunn, co-chairman of the CCCB's Bureau of Social Affairs, and I are most grateful to the organisers of this historic meeting for the preparation of a document on social, economic, and political trends which are now developing in Latin America and the Caribbean, to consider the strengths and challenges faced by the social and charitable pastoral ministry, as well as to draw up a plan of action for the forthcoming years.

A DIFFICULT CONTEXT

It was in a Colombia caught in the grips of drug traffic and terrorism, militarism and poverty, that the meeting took place at Bogotá. In the last few weeks, a high calibre bomb exploded in front of the apostolic nunciature, killing three persons. The intercommunity Justice and Peace Commission estimates that 2158 persons have disappeared, been hurt or killed in the past three months alone. The day we left the country, 35 persons died in a terrorist attack. The wonderful welcome and constant attention we were given made us nearly forget these difficult times; we felt that our hosts were truly pleased to see us and that their hopes for regular relations between our conference and theirs at the social justice ministry level continue in the years to come. This would be beneficial for the all the local Churches; it would also be a road to communion and solidarity, as we would be turned towards one another in the name of Jesus Christ, Saviour and Evangeliser.

CHALLENGING FIGURES

It isn't easy to describe in a few words the situation of Latin America and the Caribbean. At the CELAM, the countries of this immense continent are grouped into three regions: Bolivarian countries (Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia, Peru), Southern Cone countries (Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay, Argentina, Chile), Central American countries (Panama, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras), and Caribbean countries (Haiti, Dominican Republic, Cuba, Puerto Rico and the other Antilles regions). These countries together comprise a population of 400 million. Over one-third of the population (37 %) is below the age of 14. More than a million children are born each year but sad to say, 850,000 children below the age of five die every year (100 children every hour). 204 million people live in misery, and the number is growing. 40 % of families suffer from malnutrition, 44 % of the work force is unemployed, 100 million people do not have access to drinking water, and 156 million do not even have basic sanitary facilities. One must look beyond these figures to the people themselves, our very brothers and sisters who so desire to live life to the full but who are now living in impossible, even inhuman and sub-human, situations.

HOPES AND CONCERNS

Following meetings held in the last few months, each of the four regions delineated the tendencies and challenges of the socio-economic and political realities experienced in their milieu. Taken globally, one can say that at the economic level poverty keeps on growing. If the neo-liberal model has a few positive aspects (increased technological development, easier access to more and better products, relations with more countries, economic growth and economic wealth, better worldwide information and cultural exchanges), one must quickly condemn the system's criminal features (inflation, non-productivity, exaggerated bureaucracy, economic growth benefitting but a few individuals and companies, disappearance of the middle class, disgraceful increase of the impoverished and the marginalised, cutbacks in community services in education, health, and other social programmes). At the political level, one is glad to recognise that in the last ten years a number of dictatorships have disappeared and new democratic governments have been established. This democratisation is difficult to achieve because of the recent military dictatorships, because also of continued guerilla warfare, corruption within government ranks, and terrorism. It is also asserted that neither the socialist model nor neo-liberalism are a real answer to their countries' problems. The judicial system is also indicted: impunity, corruption, and unjustified arrests are greatly resented by the people. And in the Church, if the wish is that the baptised commit themselves more fully in the midst of the world because of their faith, there is also a growing contradiction between their faith and their lifestyle. New forms of commitment are recognised, whether in the area of assistance, human promotion, education, or social reconstruction. The war against hunger, concern for the unprovided for and marginalised like the AIDS victims, concern for the aboriginal peoples, formation of community leaders, and the search for peace, these are as many positive signs of a more fraternal and missionary Church.

A Happy patronal feast! May the Advent period continue to be beneficial to you!

+ François Thibodeau

+ François Thibodeau, C.J.M.

Bishop of Edmundston

« From A Bishop's Journal » (150) (04 December 1996)