
ALREADY THREE YEARS A BISHOP!



Tomorrow will mark the third anniversary of my episcopal ordination. Countless memories have accumulated, since January 9, 1994. And how many thanks I owe you for all your prayers for the innumerable marks of goodness you have shown me. We still have many projects to undertake together, God willing. More than ever let me say, *"His love is from age to age!"*

"EPISCOPAL COLLEGE"

Tomorrow evening, as I join in the inauguration of Bishop Martin Veillette's new episcopal ministry in Trois-Rivières, I shall have another opportunity to ponder how I became a member of the College of Bishops. It is as such that all bishops, in close unity with Peter's successor, comprise a unit, among themselves. In the last three years, a number of occasions arose which allowed me to experience the links that bind us to one another: the visit to Rome in 1993; regular meetings of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, meetings of the Atlantic Bishops; meetings of bishops' commissions (social communications and social justice); marks of solidarity with Bishop Samuel Ruiz of Chiapas and the Latin American Bishops' Council; being present to brother bishops, either at their ordination or anniversary, or again at special events such as the Solidarity Caravan to the Saguenay; and also, in preparing the forthcoming Synod of Bishops for America. These different activities of the Episcopal College remind me of the concern that all bishops must have for the Church as a whole. Though they may be demanding, these activities are a source of major benefits for each particular Church.

"PEOPLE OF GOD"

If episcopal solidarity has its source at the heart of the mission of Jesus the Shepherd and the sacrament of Holy Orders, there is yet another solidarity to which it is closely bound: a daily solidarity with the People of God entrusted to one's care. The many contacts I have had since my coming here in January, 1994 cannot be "numbered," but thank God that each day carried with it beautiful surprises. Each gathering with a group comprises many grace-filled elements; and the same can be said of every meeting and every celebration. I would not want these gatherings and meetings to ever become routine, because then they would become lifeless. On the contrary, each one of these get-togethers and meetings gave me great pleasure. There is certainly tiredness and even stress, at times, but there is such a thing as healthy tiredness or fatigue. After a good hockey game or cross-country ski jaunt, there is fatigue but also a good feeling of having reach a certain goal. Thanks to God I had the opportunity to inaugurate intensive pastoral visitations to each parish community. How could I ever forget all that I experienced in the Restigouche Deanery, last Lent, when each weekend I had not only the opportunity but also the grace to meet brothers and sisters who are altogether wonderful for their keen sense of faith, hope, and charity.

"TEAM LIFE"

On several occasions I told Bishop Gérard Dionne that he has bequeathed me a number of beautiful working teams. First comes the mind the Edmundston presbytery: together the priests there can pick up the pastoral challenges they come up against. I also have in mind the diocesan team that works unstintingly in different sectors of diocesan life. I also think of those who form the different diocesan and parish councils and committees:

what vitality, what solidarity, what creativity there are at every level! And then, there is the work being done in the five deaneries, where there is a greater and greater feeling of belonging and a real desire to help one another. I rejoice greatly in the fact that priests, religious, and lay people closely collaborate to the life of this Church.

THE WORLD OF THE POOR

During my three years as bishop, one of the great graces given to me was the possibility of being able to maintain a nearly-continuous contact with the people: very simple folk, very human, oftentimes needy or handicapped. Get-togethers with the poor and the sick are very special times, for me, as precious as going on pilgrimage to the most beautiful shrine. The Lord is reflected in a very special way in these persons whose faces are etched by suffering and poverty. The reflective study and commitment made together at the Bishops' Commission on Social Justice for the eradication of poverty daily challenge me. I unceasingly give thanks to God for all those who unflinchingly devote themselves to the poor and unprovided-for, and oftentimes with them: these are sure signs of hope for our world.

NECESSARY PRAYER

Throughout these years I have felt like there was some kind of prayer network encompassing the diocese and even its geographic boundaries. Prayer is the key apostolic component of all pastoral activity. I want to thank all those who continue to pray for our diocesan Church, either in thanksgiving or petition, whether in our churches or chapels, in convents or communities, at home, at work or at play, in seniors' homes or in the hospital. I daily rediscover the power of prayer: they are moments of fundamental encounters with our God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Mary, fully attentive to the Word of God, inspires us to a life of prayer. I also greatly rejoice in the eucharistic and marian movements at the heart of our Church: it is an encouraging sign for its future. We do not yet know what this Church will be like, but I am assured that if we live and work as a team, if we have concern for the poor and the sick, if we keep in touch with one another, if we draw from the waters of Christian prayer, our Church will be able to face the worst hardships and overcome them, with the help of the Holy Spirit. Nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God. I count on your fervent prayer and daily commitment. Have a good week!

+ François Thibodeau

+ François Thibodeau
Bishop of Edmundston

« From A Bishop's Journal » (155) (08 January 1997)