
SIGNS OF THE KINGDOM



I wholeheartedly thank all those who took part in the Holy Week celebrations. These holy days are special opportunities for us to grow in faith and hope and to discover signs of the Risen One's presence among us. The liturgy gives us with "signs" of this presence in the assembly we form, in the Word we welcome, and in the sacraments we celebrate. On a daily basis, we are given signs of the Kingdom in the commitments we make and the paths of solidarity we follow, especially in the company of those who are the most deprived. May all of these celebrations and commitments continue on for a long time!

CHRISM MASS

It was with great joy that I presided the Chrism Mass at St. Mary of the Angels Church, Perth-Andover, on Monday of Holy Week, during which I consecrated the oils to be used in the celebration on baptisms, confirmations, ordinations, and the anointing of the sick. This Chrism Mass is certainly a high point in the liturgical year. The presence of delegates from all the parishes is a sign of the vitality and diversity of the people of God; the presence of our priests to renew their priestly commitments before their bishop reminds the people of God of the priestly availability of these beloved collaborators. People of Perth-Andover, your warm welcome was fantastic, as were your music and singing, and the wonderful meals you put on. May the Lord repay you a hundredfold!

PERTH-ANDOVER

The pastoral visitation I made to Perth-Andover on March 23, 24, and 26 was very beneficial to me. It is good that the parish be under the patronage of "St. Mary of the Angels:" It will long be a reminder of the seventy-five year presence of the Franciscans in the Southern Victoria Deanery. At Assisi, the Basilica of St. Mary of the Angels marks one of the spots that were so very special to St. Francis of Assisi (1182-1226), this exceptional saint whose one concern was to follow Jesus in joy, simplicity of heart, devotion to the Church, admirable detachment, and kindness to everyone. St. Mary of the Angels Parish was established in 1946 and is composed of 712 Catholics in about 200 families; Father Leo Grégoire, I.V. D., has been the parish priest there these last two years. It is a pleasure to gratefully recall the names of the other pastors of the parish: Father Raymond Pennafort Willey, O. F. M. is still remembered with fondness for his having served in the Tobique from 1922 to 1942 as pastor of Maliseet and Aroostook; he was the first priest to celebrate Mass in Perth. He was followed by Franciscan Fathers Dieudonné Massé, Hilary Tardif, Wilbrod Théberge, Gregory Léger, Samuel Côté, and Norman Thibodeau. Father Alfred Irving, I.V.D., succeeded Fr. Norman, and built the new church following the 1985 and 1987 floods; he was pastor from 1981 to 1989. Father Pierre Thibodeau was pastor from 1989 to 1995.

AN IMPORTANT CENTRE

Even if we regret the reduction of the local population and the moving out of the young people, Perth-Andover is still regarded as an important region of New Brunswick, and meeting with these courageous people warmed

my heart. I was able to visit the Hotel-Dieu Hospital which was founded by the Religious Hospitallers of St. Joseph in 1947; memories of Sr. Bernadette Lévesque and Sr. Cécile Renault are still very much alive. Following the celebration of Palm Sunday Mass with Confirmation of five parish youth brunch was served to all present; this brunch has become a once-a-month tradition, appreciated by all. A meeting with the Parish Pastoral Council allowed me to broach the topic of the situation of the poor of the region. It is sad to here about a young family that has had to vacate its home for being unable to pay the taxes. The Good Samaritan Food Bank helps out some 50 families each month; this is a most appreciated interfaith initiative, with people from every denomination bringing non-perishable foodstuffs to their local church for those in need. I was able to meet a few parish elders at the Victoria Glen Manor, to see for myself how they are getting by.

PRELIMINARY EVALUATION

My 1997 pastoral visitations will have helped me get to know better these eight parish communities of the Southern Victoria Deanery, and to better appreciate everything beautiful, grand and holy that is taking place there: communities that have had to take charge of themselves and live out their faith and charity; communities that are spiritually indebted to the Franciscans but also to the diocesan missionaries, the Eudist Fathers, the Voluntas Dei Institute, as well as to the women religious congregations of the Religious Hospitallers of St. Joseph, the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, the Filles de Marie de l'Assomption, [The Assumption Sisters of Campbellton] and the Notre-Dame-du-Sacré-Coeur Sisters.[The Sacred Heart Sisters of Moncton] Important organisations like the Knights of Columbus, the Daughters of Isabella, and the Catholic Women's League have helped in forming the region. The initiatives taken in each parish regarding religious education are marvellous to see, and I want to praise all the parents and volunteers who on a weekly basis share their faith with the children. I want to thank the hundreds who are now involved in the local parish pastoral councils, the liturgy committees, youth ministry, the economic affairs committees, and sacramental preparation. There is some concern regarding the future of our parishes, there, and it is important that we immediately set to work on finding solutions by developing a priestly vocation ministry and the pastoral agents training programme. We have to maintain a steady de-compartmentalisation of parishes so as to better share personnel and pastoral resources. Work will also have to be done to ensure better provisions for an expanded marriage preparation programme. The contribution of francophone, anglophone, and aboriginal people to the past and present of our Church must be reverently preserved, respected and exposed to advantage. It is important that we witness together according to our own cultural traditions, to our faith and hope in the Risen Jesus. Thank you for your warm welcome.

+ François Thibodeau

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Bishop of Edmundston

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