
ENCOUNTER WITH THE LIVING ONE



Inaugurated on November 16, 1997, the first Synod of Bishops for the Americas will continue in Rome until December 12 of this year. Focused on the theme, *The Encounter with Jesus Christ, Path of Conversion, Communion, and Solidarity in America*, this Extraordinary Synod aims at better promoting a new evangelisation, communion among the dioceses of the Americas, and a clearheaded look at the delicate situations of international justice that exist between North, Central, and South America. Continuing where we left off last week, I offer you excerpts from a few interventions which the members of the Synod's Canadian delegation proposed to make.

FUTURE OF PARISHES

If [...] our pastoral structures are in need of conversion and often reveal a certain pastoral ineffectiveness, then it is in the parish we must begin. To assist the encounter with the living Jesus Christ, parishes need to be personalized, humanized, and open - both on a more intimate level, by means of small ecclesial communities, and on a more extensive level, through new alliances with families, schools, institutional partners, apostolic and spiritual movements, and community groups. There is no future for « sovereign » self-sufficient parishes. The future for the parish in the modern world is new alliances: with neighbouring parishes, with the living forces of their neighbourhoods and regions, [and] with the other cultural and social groups and organizations that are also involved in humanizing society.

ESSENTIAL MINISTRIES

Just as the parish needs revitalizing, so also ministries should be fine-tuned and harmonized. This is especially so in light of the encounter with the living Jesus Christ which [...] is a personal encounter. Whether it is a huge parish in Brazil or Peru, which may have more than a hundred thousand people, or a small Christian community in the Canadian Far North with fewer than a hundred people; whether an urban parish in one of the major cities or a small rural North American parish - they all have one thing in common: ordained ministers cannot handle the task. Happily, more and more Christian laity, men and women with the necessary theological and pastoral formation, are participating in pastoral ministry. They are doing this not only in virtue of their baptism and confirmation, but also in virtue of a mandate they have received from their bishop, a mandate that formally makes them pastoral workers. [...] On the basis of what has been happily experienced in the Americas over a number of years, [it would be beneficial that the Synod] recognize that the ordained ministries, working harmoniously together with lay ministries, are the means necessary for the encounter with the living Jesus Christ in America.

FORMATION TO SOLIDARITY

To encounter Jesus Christ is to share in what God is suffering because of humanity's distress - a divine suffering that has been embodied in the life, agony, crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. We cannot recognize the God revealed in Jesus Christ if we cannot recognize the outcasts around us. The rejected are part of the mystery of the incarnation, and at the heart of God's saving action. Solidarity involves the very flesh and blood

of the Church, for every celebration of the Eucharist is a pressing invitation to the Christian community to transform the world so that it become what God wants it to be. If education in solidarity is to bear fruit, there are at least two preliminary steps: understanding that we ourselves are called to change - that is not letting ourselves be defeatist- and understanding that the poor are agents of change. [...] « Those who have been excluded by our society, who are readily referred to as 'losers,' enable us to see a different perception of society's future. » [Québec Assembly of Bishops, Social Affairs Committee, *Une dignité menacée*, May 1, 1988, n^o 16 [translation]; see also n^o 20]

DIALOGUE BETWEEN CULTURES

The Gospel is « the good news of great joy for all the people.» [Luke 2:10] This truth, and the positive values people live out in very diverse situations, create common ground for a « dialogue of salvation » with all of sincere will. Speaking from the Gospel, can we not engage in this dialogue even with those who might not understand or accept all the Church's teachings? Specifically, can and should we not dialogue? With women's groups, on the basis of the Gospel's affirmation of the equal dignity of men and women, and the Church's commitment that « the active and responsible presence of women in the Church must be realized in practice. » [*Christifideles laici*, 51] *With gay and lesbian persons, on the basis of the Gospel's assertion that violence and abuse against individuals or groups are wrong in any form, and the Catechism's clear teaching that homosexual persons « must be accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity.»* [*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2358] With environmentalists, on the basis of the Gospel's affirmation that physical creation itself is of God and has inherent value, and that humans are not only stewards, not owners, for whom creation is a sacred trust. With those on the left and with all who seek justice, on the basis of the Gospel's preferential option for the poor and its affirmation that the world belongs equally to all. With those on the right, on the basis of the Gospel's affirmation that law and respect for the rights and property of others, not violence, is the Christian way. With those who are "pro-choice," and all who struggle with the Church's teachings on personal morality, on the basis of the Church's doctrine that morality is a matter of free, informed choice, in conscience, providing such a choice is not destructive. [*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 160, 1738, 2106] *With those who have suffered fractured families and failed marriages, on the basis that God has a special compassion for those whose lives are broken, and that Christ came not for the healthy but for the sick.*

DAY OF PRAYER

As usual, the monthly day of prayer will be held at the Diocesan Centre on Thursday, December 4, from 8:30 to 11:30 A.M. You are all most welcome. During this period of Advent, it is good to ask the Lord to prepare us for his coming, to recognise him in his Word, his Church, his sacraments, and in our brothers and sisters.

PATRONAL FEAST AND INTERNET

Monday, December 8, is the patronal feast of the Cathedral parish and of the Diocese of Edmundston - the feast of the Immaculate Conception. For the occasion I shall be celebrating mass at the cathedral on Saturday, December 6, at 7:15 P.M. This date will also mark the official inauguration of our getting onto the Internet highway. Our web site address is <http://www.francophone.net/diocese>. Have a good week!

+ François Thibodeau

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Bishop of Edmundston

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