
ZERO POVERTY



The Advent liturgy doesn't waste words, it challenges us profoundly. Here is what it told us through the prophet Isaiah: *Learn to do good, make justice your aim; redress the wronged, hear the orphan's plea, defend the widow.* And we asked in the closing prayer for courage along the way of justice along which we meet the Lord.

THE PLAIN PEOPLE'S PARLIAMENT

Twenty years ago Claude Snow, a social worker of Caraquet, N.B., wrote a small book called *Le Parlement du monde ordinaire* ["The Plain People's Parliament"], where we read the following: « *I have come to think that it is time to set aside our study commission reports, our statistics, scientific research and other like documents, listen to what the plain people have to say, and try to understand them.* » In the very first lines of the October 17, 1996 Canadian Bishops' message on the struggle against poverty, they write: « *We shall find new and fair solutions by relating to those who are so rudely affected by poverty. Who are those who see better than us the impoverished, the grave consequences of poverty? Society would find in our midst an institution of post-graduate studies if only it had ears to hear.* »

THE PARLIAMENT OF THE STREET

An article titled *The Poor Are Such a Bother* ("Les pauvres, c'est bien achalant"), journalist Ghislaine Rheault writes: « *When I hear those hearts of stone curse the poor rather than attack the injustices, the bad distribution of riches, when I hear the hard-fat privilege-stuffed people who earn enough to look after ten families, criticise the unfortunate condemned to live on welfare cheques, I fly into a fit. I tell myself that we are very far along the road to heartlessness.* » At the « Parliament of the Street » that was established in November in Québec City, one could read, « *Poverty can be ignored, tolerated, or defeated.* » For us baptised disciples of Jesus, these three alternatives are not an option. We cannot ignore poverty: it is constantly growing. Nor can we tolerate it: in this case we would be complicit in an unjust and unjustified system.

DEFEATING POVERTY

We must defeat poverty under whatever guise it is, with all the means at our disposal, and with all those that we can give ourselves. We cannot neglect either of these means. For the poor, every resource is precious. The means that seems the most fragile must not be eliminated. WE need but remember the fight between David and Goliath: with a few stones, David changed the course of history. In the same way, when there is talk of the globalisation of our relationships, of our limitations as well as of our resources, no stone must be excluded in the upbuilding of a society based on justice and solidarity. Does not the Gospel remind us that the Kingdom of heaven is like leaven in dough, salt in food, a mustard seed...? Still, it is a kingdom of justice and truth, of life and peace that the Lord has wanted to establish. Food banks and soup kitchens have become indispensable for the needy in our society: they are a cry of distress addressed to all who are in the seat of responsibility.

ENCOURAGING THE MILITANT

Our 1996 pastoral letter was an encouragement and a mark of gratitude to all those who labour at eliminating poverty, even with the most limited means. If we have laid more stress on job creation, to eliminate poverty, we also discussed at length the importance of listening to the poor and with the needy find new ways of dealing with the problem. We must be in solidarity with the poor. Our message also went from proclaiming the God News to the ministry of denunciation, a very sensitive ministry but one that is nonetheless indispensable. People must take precedence over systems. People first, in all their human dignity. A seeking after the Kingdom of God before any profit-seeking. This poverty and misery in our midst are an insult to our God. We shall have to let ourselves be motivated by Jesus of Nazareth who did not fear to take a whip to the vendors in the Temple area, and to upset the money lenders' tables. In this period of the globalisation of human relations, does not our universe, which is and which must remain the temple of God, risk becoming a den of thieves? Hence is there not urgent need to find the strategies needed to chase away those responsible for breaking apart the work of God, and who condemn so many of our brothers and sisters to misery and distress?

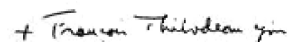
FORMATION TO SOLIDARITY

On November 19, Archbishop Roger Ébächer spoke at the Roman Synod of Bishops, to stress the indispensable need for formation in solidarity. Among other things, he said: « *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 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.* » The Archbishop continues by proposing that we deepen our understanding of the conditions needed for formation in solidarity, among which are: knowing the other's experiences, because compassion passes through information; analyzing the causes of these situations. Among the means for reading the signs of the times, social analysis is part of a conversion process the finality of which is that hearts and structures become as God wants them. Acting in solidarity: This action passes through awareness of the poor as first agents of change, and it is experienced in union with community groups and the other Churches.

A CONSTANT HOPE

I make mine the conclusion of the Bishops' message: « *Despite the difficult situations and the modest gains we must rediscover the prophetic strength of witnesses to the Gospel, the source of our hope for a better world.* »

Have a good week.



+ François Thibodeau
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