
A JOYFUL LENT



This year, we are invited to a joyful celebration of Lent: *Restore to us the joy of your salvation!* is our lenten theme, this year. It might be surprising to identify the lenten season with joy; austerity, symbolised by the wearing of purple vestments, subtracts nothing from our joy. It can even be an opportunity for us to further realise that Lent is a time of grace, a time of conversion, a time of deep intimacy with God, a time of communion with our brothers and sisters, especially the most deprived. The consequence of all of this cannot be other than joy.

« FATHER I AM YOUR CHILD »

If in the next few says and weeks we would only discover or rediscover how much God loves us, how He cherishes us, how each person has much worth in the eyes of God, that would be a marvellous discovery indeed. We would overflow with joy for having discovered our life's pearl of great price. It would then be no surprise for our hearts to overflow with joy, as it happened to the Virgin Mary, in the presence of God, her Saviour. If we are attentive to the all-loving presence of God our Father who sees in secret, if we truly consider ourselves His beloved children, an intense joy will fill our hearts. We shall have discovered an all-powerful God who is attentive to everyone. And we will catch ourselves singing « *Oh Father, I am your child, and I have a thousand proofs of your love. I want to praise you in song, with the songs of joy of my baptism.* » It will then be a joyful song, a song of gratitude, a song of petition also, to live according to this love.

ALMSGIVING, PRAYER, AND FASTING

If we are faithful in practising almsgiving to the poor, if we are faithful to prayer, to fasting, to penance, joy will accompany our actions. Does not the Lord say, « *When you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.* » [Matthew 6:3-4] The presence of God the Father is a guarantee of this new-found joy.

« YOUR NIGHT SHALL SHINE AS THE NOONDAY SUN »

The composer J. Akepsimas wrote a most revealing song based on a text from the prophet Isaiah: « *If you untie the knots of servitude, if you free your brother from his chains, the night of your path shall be like the noonday light. Then from you there will well up a spring to give life to the world of tomorrow, the spring that gives life all of God's world* » That is also what the both the liturgy reminds us in both the breviary and the eucharistic celebration: « *Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the things of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not hide yourself from your own kin? Then your light shall rise in the darkness and our gloom be like the noonday... The Lord will satisfy your needs in parched places... and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail. Great shall be your joy if you destroy the causes of oppression, if you raise up your humiliated brother or sister. Your light shall break forth like the dawn. If you denounce the evil that binds the human, if you satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then the night of your prayer shall be as the noonday.* » [Cf. Isaiah 58:6-11]

WALK IN JOY!

« People of God, walk in joy, » another lenten hymn urges us, « because the Lord is with you. God has chosen you from among the people; none other has He treated this way as a sign of His work. Be a witness to His goodness. God has set a table for you, He has led you to abundance. It is now up to you to share the bread of humankind today. People of God, walk in joy, because the Lord is with you. »

HYMN TO JOY

Joy inhabited the heart of Mother Teresa. The very constitutions of Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity stipulate that the lives of its members must be permeated with joy, and that the sisters must be encouraged to view passing on this joy as a requisite aspect of their apostolate. Mother Teresa composed the following hymn to joy: *« Joy is prayer, joy is strength, joy is love. God loves those who give with joy. The best way to show gratitude to God and neighbour is to accept everything in joy. Never let sorrow overwhelm you to the point of forgetting the joy of the risen Christ. We all look forward to heaven where God resides, but it is within our power to experience heaven in the here-and-now by loving as He loves, helping as He helps, giving as He gives, serving as He serves, being in His presence twenty-four hours a day, touching Him as he conceals himself in the guise of the destitute, in the poor and in the suffering. A joyful heart is the normal result of a heart ablaze with love. It is a gift of the Spirit, a sharing in the joy of Jesus living in one's soul. »* Let us keep in our hearts, says Mother Teresa, the joy of God's love, and let us share that joy in loving one another as He loves each and everyone of us.

REVEAL THE GENTLENESS OF GOD

I therefore urge you to experience the 1998 lenten season in a spirit of joy. The Lord is walking with us, he gives us his Holy Spirit. This lenten period will be most important in helping us further understand our mission as Church in the midst of the world: to tell our brothers and sisters about the gentleness of God and His infinite love. This lenten period will be important in helping us take up the different challenges confronting us. I invite you to be fully united to the 60,000 baptised in our diocese who also are on this lenten journey to Easter.

UNITED TO THE UPPER MADAWASKA DEANERY

Remain united in a very special way with the people of the Upper Madawaska Deanery, this year: that is where I am making my pastoral visitation, this year, the third such intensive visit since my episcopal ordination. A pastoral visitation is a joyful event given to us to help us grow in faith, hope, and charity. The Chrism Mass will be celebrated at Baker Brook on April 6, and the Third Diocesan Eucharistic Congress will be held there June 12, 13, and 14.

RESTIGOUCHE DEANERY

As a follow-up to the February session, the third meeting will be held, this time in the Restigouche deanery. Members of the parish pastoral councils, liturgy committees, economic affairs committees, and parish committees of Saint-Quentin, Saint-Martin, Kedgwick, and Saint-Jean-Baptiste parishes are convened to a meeting to be held in the Saint-Martin Parish Hall (Assumption Church) on Saturday, March 28, from 9:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. The topic of the meeting will be the meaning of mission in restructuring. Father Roger Dionne, V.G., and Sister Claudette Ruest, S.M., will be the facilitators. Have a good week!

+ François Thibodeau

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Bishop of Edmundston

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