
FAMILY AND EUCHARIST



In expressing my deep gratitude to all who were involved in preparing and carrying out the third Diocesan Eucharistic Congress and brought it to a resoundingly successful conclusion, I would like to mention three realities that were brought to light, during these unforgettable days.

PRECIOUS MEMORIES

By reaching back to my earliest family memories in Saint-Odilon, Québec, I realise that it is certainly daily family prayer along with getting ready for church that have left its deepest imprint on me; these are ties that bind together our life of faith and our mutual relationships. Our life of faith had to be reflected in our daily behaviour. The love we had received in the sacrament of reconciliation and in the Eucharist had to take concrete form in loving words and deeds, in forgiveness and in helping one another. I fondly recall that day of May 19, 1946, when I made my First Communion. We covered the five kilometres to church by horse and buggy. We had gotten up around five in the morning so as to make it to church on time. What a joy it was to welcome in my heart this Jesus who wanted to make his home in me!

UPLIFTING MEMORIES

I invite you, too, to bring back memories of your own first communion and of the impact which this event had on your family life. It is said that a soul that is uplifted lifts up the world. The person or family that gets in touch with the very fountain of Love cannot help but be transformed, and one realises that one reacts as Peter did on Mount Tabor, at the Transfiguration: « *Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah, [and another for us].* » (Mt. 17:4)

BUILDING SOLIDLY

What changes have occurred in our families, these last fifty years. After years and years of worry, doubt, beating around the bush, and questioning, it is important to once again find solid bases on which to build not only our own individual persons but also our families and our Church.

EMMANUEL, GOD-WITH-US

During this third Eucharistic Congress in preparation for the year 2000 we gave thanks to God for the desire He has always manifested, to abide with us. We gave thanks for Jesus, the Emmanuel, God-with-Us, who comes to live not in any old place but in specific ones, and in specific persons.

« YOU ARE MY HOUSE »

Jesus comes to live in our diocesan Church and he come to live in us, too. « *My house, O Jesus, is you, and your house is me. And for this I praise you, Alleluia; I praise you, Alleluia!* » This [French] hymn was composed a few years ago in the Upper Madawaska, and it expresses an incredible marvel. In the Eucharist we find the marvellous sign of the presence of Jesus, the sacramental sign which reminds us of the Emmanuel's desire to abide with us. « *[My Father and I] will come to them and make our home with them.* » (Jn. 14:23) This, to me, is the great discovery of every eucharistic celebration and eucharistic congress, God's unrelenting desire to abide with us.

EMOTIONAL GROWTH

The second discovery that this third Eucharistic Congress invites us to make is the grateful rediscovery of our families and of heir irreplaceable mission. Whatever our family, whether it be a young one or one mature in years, whether it be a growing family or one facing many difficulties, our families are very special places for us to grow both on an emotional and a faith level. We must be very attentive to the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of our families, we must be attentive to the poor and the afflicted among us, because these joys and hopes, grief and anguish are those of the followers of Christ as well. And nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts. [Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 1] Our families are built on women, men and children brought together in Christ, led by the Holy Spirit on their journey to the Kingdom of the Father; they are bearers of a message of salvation which we must offer to others. Our families must account for the hope that is theirs, for their hope whose basis is Christ.

AN UNCHANGEABLE LOVE

We can say with Saint Paul, « *Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution...? [nothing] will separate us from the love of God.* » (Rm. 8:35, 39) We must realise that God loves each one of our families and that far from being indifferent to their future and changing nature, God wants to abide with each one of these families of ours. Just as Jesus lived with Mary and Joseph in Nazareth, so does he come to live with each one of our families.

WONDERFUL SUNDAYS

Come comes to live with us, He comes to live with each one of our families. God calls us to make of our Sunday gatherings special places to grow not only as a Christian community but also as a human family. This is, to me, the third discovery of the Eucharistic Congress. We have the grace to experience each Sunday as family and community time that can become one of dep communion, of fellowship and of gratitude, a priceless time for our families. I challenge all of our families with all their members to fearlessly work at making our Sunday gatherings unforgettable and invaluable moments, a time of forgiveness and giving, a time for new individual and community beginnings, a time when together we incite one another to greater faith and hope, a time where love is shown in both word and deed.

A RETURN TO BASICS

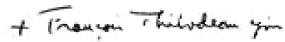
The way of celebrating and of our gatherings has certainly changed, over the years, but it is important for us to come back to the basics of personal and community life. I hope to hear you say over and over again that God

continues to abide with you, that He wants to live with each one of your families, and that our Sunday gatherings can be opportunities for outstanding family get-togethers.

COMMITMENTS

I hope that my brother priests continue to be signs of this presence of God among His People, and that my friends in the religious life continue to be special signs of the Love of God; that my friends the pastoral agents continue to show to introduce this God of Love to others, and to make Him loved by them. I hope that in each one of our deaneries, whether in the Restigouche or Southern Victoria, Grand Falls, Edmundston, or the Upper Madawaska, all my baptised and confirmed friends continue to witness to the Love of Jesus Christ and that they continue being witnesses of our Saviour God, to earnestly live their baptism and confirmation commitments, and the intense union between their families and the Eucharist. May God complete in you what He has so well begun! may this Eucharist be for the praise of God, for the glory of God and the salvation of the World!

Have a good week!



+ François Thibodeau

Bishop of Edmundston

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