

---

## FAITHFUL TO THE END (1)

---



For the fifth consecutive year I have written a pastoral letter to the people of the diocese, on the occasion of Pentecost Sunday. For the next few weeks I shall share it with you, in a series of instalments.

The Holy Spirit given to us especially at baptism and confirmation continues to fill us with the love of God and to faithfully guide us in the mission entrusted to us. What is this mission? It is to keep alive the memory of Jesus. It is to tirelessly go out and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and to make disciples by passing on to them what Jesus has handed down to us. For this to happen it is vital for us to welcome and acknowledge in the depths of ourselves the Spirit of Jesus. « *You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses (...) to the ends of the earth,* » (Acts 1:8) was Jesus' promise before ascending to the Father.

After reflecting on the fidelity of some of our ancestors in the faith in the Old and New Testaments we shall realize that we are called to deeply live our own fidelity to the Lord with the courage, boldness and imagination that the Gospel gives us..

### FAITHFUL LIKE PETER

I spent ten days in Rome at the end of March, 1998: days of prayer, reflection, and rest. I prayed and prayed to the Lord Jesus, his Mother and his Apostles to help me live in a holy and faithful way the episcopal mission that was handed on to me in 1993. Every day I had the occasion of visiting one of the city's churches. That was how I was able to get to the *Domine, Quo Vadis* church on foot; the church is near the Catacomb of St. Callistus, and it was popularized by the novel-turned movie, *Quo Vadis*, written by the Polish Nobel laureate Henrik Sienkiewicz (1840-1916). According to tradition, the church marks the spot where Peter, on the verge of leaving Rome in order to avoid being persecuted, imprisoned and tortured, met Christ on the Appian Way. And Peter would have asked him, *Quo vadis, Domine?* (*Where are you going, Lord?*) And the Lord would have answered, *Venio Romam iterum crucifigi.* (*I am going to Rome to be crucified anew.*)

### A FIDELITY PUT TO THE TEST

Are we not tempted to drop everything when faced with incomprehension from others, with indifference, suffering, and persecution? At such times Jesus meets us along the road in order to finish the task that had been given to us. But rather than the reproachful tone we may feel underlies the words above allegedly spoken to Peter by Jesus, we could hear his friendly and merciful words, similar in feeling to those he spoke to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, *Et tu, amice, quo vadis?* (*And you, my friend, where are you going?*) Words such as these would have helped Peter review his growth and his entire life in an atmosphere of complete trust. In this new pastoral letter I want to ask the Holy Spirit to manifest Himself once again to each and everyone of us as the supreme consoler, as the gentle host of our souls, *Sweet refreshment, sweet repose;* I ask Him to *bend the stubborn heart and will,/ melt the frozen, warm the chill,/ guide the wayward home once more!/ Come, O Father of the poor,/ come, whose treasured gifts ensure,/ come, our heart's unfailing light./ Cleanse our soiled hearts of sin./ Arid souls refresh within,/ wounded lives to health restore.* (Sequence for Pentecost Sunday)


## « WHY HAVE YOU TOLD ME TO LOVE ? »

Whether one be in charge of a diocese, a parish, or a family, there are times when one would be very tempted to give up such a seemingly burdensome, even inhuman, task. When this happens, the prayer of Father Michel Quoist could easily come to our lips: *Lord, why have you told me to love my brothers and sisters? I have tried but I come back to you frightened. Lord, I was so peaceful at home, I was comfortable and had settled down. But you discovered a chink in my armour, a breach in my fortress. Like a cold shower on a sleepy face the cries of others woke me up; like a gust of wind, a friendship shook me up; as a shy and unassuming ray of sun, your grace has challenged me... These have come at me from every quarter in successive waves, one wave pushing onto the other, shoving the other forward... I can't anymore! It is just too much! This is no life! Lord, I have lost everything and am not even my own person; there is no more room for me, in me. - Fear not , says the Lord, you have won everything, because while your stronghold was being stormed by others I, your Father, I sneaked in among them.*

## THE FIDELITY OF GOD

Before considering the quality of our fidelity it is important to turn to our God, the God of total fidelity, and to worship Him for His incomprehensible merciful love for every human being. It is as if we were hearing Jesus say to us: « *Be faithful as your heavenly Father is faithful.* » The psalmists never tired of singing about the divine faithfulness: « *I will sing of your steadfast love, O Lord, forever; with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations. I declare that your steadfast love is established forever; your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens... Let the heavens praise your wonders, O Lord, your faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones.* » (Ps. 89:1-2, 5) Mercy, love, gentleness, grace, fidelity - FAITHFULNESS: these realities cannot be dissociated from God; His merciful love does not cease to extend to all humankind. The short Psalm 117 testifies to this: « *Praise the Lord, all you nations! Extol him, all you peoples! For great is his steadfast love toward us, and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever.* » Psalm 100 is a variation on the theme: « *Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing... For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.* » (Ps.100:1-2, 5) And in her marvellous *Magnificat*, the Virgin Mary gives thanks to God for His merciful and faithful love: HIS LOVE IS FROM AGE TO AGE. Created in the image and likeness of God we, God`s creation, are charged with revealing this faithfulness of God. The liturgy of the Church puts the following words on our lips: *God who is faithful and just, listen to your Church at prayer, as you listened to Jesus your servant. When her breath dwindles within her, let her live from the breath of your Spirit, that she meditate on the work of your hands so as to go forward free and trusting, to the dawning of her Passover.* In time of trial, a prayer such as this has the power to rekindle our hope.

Have a good week!



+ François Thibodeau  
Bishop of Edmundston

« From A Bishop's Journal » (235) (22 July 1998)