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## 125 YEARS OF NURSING CARE (2)

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October 4 of this year marked the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Hotel Dieu Sisters in our milieu. In expressing our gratitude to them I want to point out that the congregation is a great gift of God to us. I want, therefore, to share with you their charism and their spiritual journey.

### GENTLENESS AND COMPASSION

Before all else I want to stress the tenderness and compassion of these sisters, as well as the special charism that is theirs and which is at the root of the beautiful work they have been accomplishing in our milieu. They have shared not only with one another but also with other Christians, other associates, the precious treasure handed on to them by their founders and predecessors, and I heartily congratulate them for it. Free to love and to serve, it was their concern to ensure the continuation of their community with the addition of other persons who would be free, also, to love and to serve. This education in freedom and compassion is very demanding, but it is critical that such an effort be pursued throughout their existence.

### THE COMPASSION OF GOD

In his book *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, [*The Return of the Prodigal Son. A Story of Homecoming*. New York: Doubleday-Image, 1992] Henri Nouwen describes in a few words the compassion of God. "*As Father, the only authority he claims for himself is the authority of compassion. That authority comes from letting the sins of his children pierce his heart. There is no lust, greed, anger, resentment, jealousy, or vengeance in his lost children that has not caused immense grief to his heart. The grief is so deep because the heart is so pure. From the deep inner place where love embraces all human grief, the Father reaches out to his children. The touch of his hands, radiating inner light, seeks only to heal. Here is the God I want to believe in: a Father who, from the beginning of creation, has stretched out his arms in merciful blessing, never forcing himself on anyone, but always waiting; never letting his arm drop down in despair, but always hoping that his children will return so that he can speak words of love to them and let his tired arms rest on their shoulders. His only desire is to bless.*" [Pages 96-97]

### LEARNING TO BE COMPASSIONATE LIKE GOD

Nouwen continues by stating that Jesus has come to show us very clearly that the God he is talking about is a merciful God, a God of compassion: "*The God whom Jesus announces and in whose name he acts is the God of compassion, the God who offers himself as example and model for all human behavior. But there is more. Becoming like the heavenly Father is not just one important aspect of Jesus' teaching, it is the very heart of his message. [...] The way human beings are called to love one another is God's way. We are called to love one another with the same selfless outgoing love [of God the Father]. The compassion with which we are called to love cannot be based upon a competitive life-style. [...] If we are not only to be received by God, but also to receive as God, we must become like the heavenly Father and see the world through his eyes.*" [Pages 125, 126] These words of Henri Nouwen give us an idea of what compassion according to the heart of Jesus is all about. Education to freedom and education to compassion are caught through being contagious, at first, and then

are given through strategies. The importance which the sisters give to basic formation leads to ongoing commitment, and permanent formation helps the sisters totally live their consecration as Religious Hospitallers of St. Joseph, dedicated to service to God and the Church.

## **SPIRITUAL AGENDA**

*"Focused on Christ, community life is rooted in faith and develops in fraternal love. In this spirit, the sisters respect one another and maintain among themselves unity and charity, like sisters whose model is the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. Attentive to the Spirit within, the sisters help one another love God above all else." In a book she wrote on Jerome Le Royer de la Dauversière, Sister Bertille Beaulieu describes the spiritual agenda set down by their founder: "The spirituality which Jerome expounds in the rules of the Confraternity of the Holy Family is based on love and unity among the members of the Holy Family of Nazareth, [a love and unity] which lead to the love which exists between the three persons of the Blessed Trinity. First, the Christian member of the confraternity can choose to address Saint Joseph and, with him, approach the Virgin Mary. Then, through Joseph and Mary, he comes to Jesus the Son of God who in turn directs him to the Father and the Holy Spirit, helping him in this way to enter into the love which exists within the Blessed Trinity. The rule of life and the spirituality which Jerome imparts to the Daughters of Saint Joseph who are also members of the Confraternity of the Holy Family, follow a given agenda. Through the Holy Family the sisters can reach the love which is at the heart of the Blessed Trinity, the supreme source of gentleness and compassion which shine forth in the care and concern they have to lead to God the poor, the sick, and the destitute." Contemplation of the Blessed Trinity also becomes a place where love of the Trinity is embodied.*

## **GRATITUDE**

With you I therefore give thanks for the gift of their congregation to the Church and to humankind; with you I give thanks for the outstanding charism of kindness and compassion which is a hallmark of the Congregation; with you I give thanks for the spiritual agenda which the remarkable layman, Jerome Le Royer de la Dauversière, and of Mother Marie de la Ferre have passed on to them; with you I give thanks for the 125 years of apostolate in the Madawaska region. May the Jubilee route to the unexpected places of Compassionate God, which the sisters are called to take in the years to come, be a route of peace and joy. Have a good week!

*+ François Thibodeau*

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Bishop of Edmundston

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