
A TRIBUTE TO BISHOP MARIE-ANTOINE ROY



On November 7 I celebrated the fiftieth anniversary Mass of the death of Bishop Marie-Antoine Roy (October 27, 1948). It is good to recall who was the founding bishop of our diocese.

15,000 PRESENT

October 27 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Bishop Marie-Antoine Roy. In perusing the *Le Madawaska* newspaper issue of time, we read that on the occasion over 15,000 people filed by the body of the founder of the diocese, and that several archbishops, bishops, and priests joined in the memorable funeral service. Secure in the belief that Bishop Marie-Antoine Roy continues to lovingly watch over his diocesan Church, let us recall a few traits regarding the life and ministry of this remarkable bishop.

CONFIDENCE, SERVICE, LOVE

In accepting the mission confided to him to become the first bishop of the new diocese of Edmundston, Bishop Roy had but one desire, that of sharing the riches of the grace of Christ with his brothers and sisters. *Evangelizare divitias Christi*, "To Proclaim the Riches of Christ," was his motto. And in the address he pronounced following his episcopal ordination, he stated: "I was sent to you, and I come with confidence. I was sent for you; I come in service to you. I was sent to work with you; I come with love." Confidence, service, love will become the hallmark of his three-year ministry in the diocese of Edmundston.

A VERY GOOD FATHER

But then, who was Bishop Marie-Antoine Roy? Those who saw him in action between 1945 and 1948 can bear witness to him. From several accounts from 1948 preserved in the *Annales* of the Blessed Sacrament Sisters, we read the following, among others: *Some will call Bishop Marie-Antoine Roy a great bishop, others, an unparalleled writer, and still others, a powerful orator. But to us his children, Servants of the Blessed Sacrament, it is a very good father that we have lost. His Excellency was such a one, according to the virile meaning of the word "good," a father in a most affectionate sense. He was aware of his responsibilities. With great feeling he would repeat to us these words of St. John of the Cross: "On the evening of our lives we shall be judged on love!"*

A BISHOP OF THE STATE OF GRACE

Here is a moral picture of His Excellency drawn by Mr. Lucien Fortin: *"The picture of the imposing and engaging figure of this great prelate comes to each one of us through the special framework of death. [We] remember this man whose energetic action took in all spheres of activity where the spiritual interests of his people lay. This most apostolic directive which he had made the programme of his episcopacy: To Proclaim the Riches of Christ, was the basis of his unshakable determination when confronted with conformism which he called a double conscience and a 'false displacing of values,' which he strove to replace with a truly*

Christian spirit inspired by grace, this great sanctifying grace on which he so insisted. One would need to have his depth of thinking and his knowledge of souls to do justice to this superior being who attracts the admiration of all for the work accomplished. His great soul was altogether given over to service of God, [along with] his sharp intellect, his visionary spirit, his determination in carrying out a task, his remarkable erudition, his high spirituality, his engaging energy, even his imposing dignity as well as his paternal goodness in his personal relationship with his people. The warmth of his preaching that moved the crowds. His writings where, according to Cardinal Villeneuve himself, doctrine and a practical character mingled. The sanctification of souls was the grand passion of his life. He was, like it has been so well said, 'the bishop of the state of grace.' There is, here, a transcendent concern which inspired his entire pontificate. A preacher of the state of grace, he sought to establish its life-giving source in his own diocese. It was in this manner that there arose the three great realisations of his pontificate: Collège Saint-Louis, a centre of learning. The retreat house, a centre of resurrection and sanctification; and the convent of the Sisters Adorers of the Most Blessed Sacrament, which he qualified the lightning rod of all his works. And he lays claim to other titles as well: Apostle of the clergy, bishop of education, and bishop of Catholic Action."

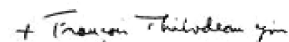
SOUGHT-AFTER PREACHER

Born in Saint-Michel-de-Bellechasse, [Québec], March 24, 1893, Bishop Marie-Antoine was the fourth of a family of sixteen, seven of whom would become priests and religious, and three who would become nuns. He was ordained a priest for the diocese of Québec at the age of 23, August 6, 1916, by Cardinal Bégin. After one year's ministry as curate of Sainte-Croix-de-Lotbinière Parish he requested admission into the Franciscan Order. He was accepted into the Order July 14, 1917 and made his solemn profession in 1921. Endowed with a remarkable gift of oratory, he was a sought-after preacher of missions who insisted that his listeners rekindle their commitment as children of God. Appointed bishop of the newly-founded diocese of Edmundston in July, 1945, he was consecrated bishop by Archbishop Antoniutti the following month. After hardly three years of energetic ministry, he died of heart trouble October 27, 1948, at the age of 55. At the time of his episcopal ordination he had repeated these words of Saint Francis de Sales: *"I have made the great terrible vow of the charge of souls and of dying for them if it is helpful."* This vow, Bishop Roy accomplished it in the short span of his well-filled life.

A PRECIOUS LEGACY

As the fifth bishop of Edmundston, I want to be inspired by our founding bishop. By advocating in December 1995, at the closing of the festivities marking the fiftieth anniversary of the diocese, the awarding on a trial basis of an annual prize designated the *Bishop Marie-Antoine Roy Prize*, to a group or a community which has shown remarkable growth in the areas of faith education, celebration of the sacraments, fraternal charity, and social engagement, I believed that this would be an incentive to us to renew with our short history and be inspired by this man of God who was providentially sent to the new diocesan Church of Edmundston. His desire to proclaim in word and deed the riches of Christ, his great devotion to Jesus in the Eucharist and the Immaculate Virgin, his concern for the young and the adults, all of this moves us to bring to fruition the marvellous legacy we have received: May we benefit from all that was good, great and holy for him.

Have a good week!



+ François Thibodeau
Bishop of Edmundston

« From A Bishop's Journal » (252) (18 November 1998)