
« HIS LOVE IS FROM AGE TO AGE »



January 9 will mark the fifth anniversary of my episcopal ordination and my presence among you. I want to thank the Lord for these five grace-filled years, ask his forgiveness for those times I have been remiss in my pastoral duties, and beg his aid, that I may be ever faithful to him. Brothers and sisters of this beloved Church, I thank you for your prayers, your solidarity, and your friendship. May the following excerpts of my first address to you be a token of my affection for you.

A WONDERFUL MISSION

Filled with the Lord's blessings, we proclaim to all the world that "His love is from age to age!" Today this Word of the Lord is being fulfilled: *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."* [Luke 4:18-19] We can proclaim in a loud voice that "The love of the Lord is everlasting; the love of God has shown itself today especially to the Church of Edmundston. We are the beloved sons and daughters of God our Father, in Jesus Christ the Redeemer. The Holy Spirit is upon us."

A COMMON MISSION

This January 9 once again reflects God's goodness to His people. In His infinite goodness He wants all the baptised to share in the mission of Jesus Christ, His beloved Son: in his priestly mission, his prophetic mission, his royal mission. A common mission binds us together: to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus, and to make disciples. Thanks to the Holy Spirit, the same communion impels us to serve the Gospel and our sisters and brothers of the world. In becoming the fifth bishop of Edmundston, my desire is to respond wholeheartedly to the will of the Lord who has shown me so much love. I have been ordained bishop to serve my brothers and sisters of the Church of Edmundston, to witness to God in all things and glorify him daily on behalf of the entire Church, and to help in establishing his Kingdom of happiness, justice, and peace.

OPEN THE DOORS!

Following the example of the Holy Father, I want to repeat to you the words he himself spoke on the day of his being made pope: *"Do not be afraid! Open wide the doors to Christ! Open up the borders of states, economic and political systems, the vast fields of culture, tradition, and development, to his saving power! Do not be afraid! Christ knows what there is in the human being. And he alone knows!"*

FOLLOWING BISHOP DIONNE

Bishop Gérard Dionne, I thank you for having accepted to ordain me bishop, in this way making visible the episcopal continuity of the Edmundston See. It is an honour for me to be your successor, but it is also a great challenge. Be assured that I will do all in my power so that all that you have started, especially the School of Faith and the 1987-

1990 Diocesan Synod, will continue to bear fruit. May this new period of grace that is opening to you bring you the fullness of joy and contemplation in the Lord's wonderful work. On behalf of the Church of Edmundston I express deep gratitude for your ten years as head of the See of Edmundston. And to the people of New Brunswick, to my brothers and sisters of the Church of Edmundston, I want to proclaim day after day God's everlasting love for them.

ACCORDING TO THE HEART OF GOD

Priests, deacons, and seminarians of the Church of Edmundston, I would like to tell you how much I want to be united to you throughout my ministry at Edmundston. The Lord asks us to be pastors according to his heart, to proclaim by our whole lives that his love is very much alive. We must before all else be constant in prayer and to the service of the Word. My wish today is that we set aside, either together or in our respective milieus and on a monthly basis, a day given over to silence and contemplation, adoration and spiritual renewal, prayer and petition, penance and conversion. I ask the Lord to allow me to live such moments the first Thursday of each month as I meditate on the Word of God and the teaching of Vatican Council II on the mystery of the Church: it shall be for me a way of carrying out one of my most important obligations, to pray tirelessly for the people of God, and to carry out properly the bishop's priestly office.

A PRICELESS GIFT

I thank the Lord for the beautiful gift he gives me today, as he entrusts me with the Church of Edmundston. The ring I wear is symbolic of the wonderful betrothal with the Church of Edmundston. It is wholeheartedly and with eagerness that I accept to love and serve this Church in joyful times and in painful ones. Ours is a young Church, a special Church stamped by the Maliseet, francophone, and anglophone cultures. It is a wonderful meeting-place for peoples and nations, where there is healthy competition for friendliness, resourcefulness, autonomy, and solidarity.

PRIORITIES

I have major priorities: a new evangelisation, so that our Christians rediscover the joy of being missionaries; a rediscovery of the Gospel, so that together we live day by day as Jesus himself would; a rediscovery of our dignity and mission as baptised people, so that as beloved sons and daughters we share with our fellow citizens the hope which Jesus the Son of the living God brings to us. For our Church be a church of communion, communication must continue and even increase at every level. First contacts I have had with the media here show every sign of promise. It will be very important, too, to be attentive to the families in our midst, especially the young ones; we shall have to be attentive, also, to families in the grip of social, economic, and even church-related difficulties. But above all, we shall have to pray the Lord to send workers to his harvest, pastors after his heart, to our parishes, our milieus, workplaces and places of leisure: priests, brothers and sisters, pastoral agents and Christian leaders, so that each community continue to be vibrant, devoted, and missionary.

+ François Thibodeau

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Bishop of Edmundston

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