
IN BEAUTIFUL MALABEAM COUNTRY (2)



In his book *Histoire du Madawaska*, Father Thomas Albert states that *"the Maliseet hero in Malabeam has been praised in the Abenaki, French, and English tongues. What a rich subject for future writers about the Madawaska region. Greek history, which is so rich in chivalrous deeds of all kinds, has nothing to offer which is greater or nobler than the simple and hidden sacrifice of this daughter of the woods."* In visiting the falls at Grand Falls and as we drive along the Tobique-Madawaska Road, let us remember that Malabeam can still instill in the local population a sense of pride, generosity, courage, and patriotism. Not far from the falls is a church dedicated to an Eastern martyr of the fourth century who, according to legend, slew a dragon: Saint George, too, can inspire valour, perseverance, and holiness.

SAINT-GEORGES

The town of Grand Falls has two Catholic parishes: Assumption, which I visited last week, was established in 1868, and Saint-Georges, founded in 1950, and which I visited this past February 26 and 27. I sincerely thank all who made this visitation the unforgettable success it was, especially Father Normand Godbout, the pastor, Mr. Roger Thériault, the pastoral agent, and the members of the parish pastoral council. It is difficult to meet everyone in such a short time span but the different meetings and celebrations allowed me to greet hundreds of parishioners, students, teachers, business people, labourers, the handicapped, truckers, the elderly and the sick, along with the parish economic affairs committee and the parish pastoral council.

A GIFT OF THE HOLY YEAR

At the time of the 1950 Holy Year, Bishop Joseph-Roméo Gagnon established two new parishes in the Edmundston Diocese: Notre-Dame-du-Rosaire at Connors and Saint-Georges at Grand Falls. The latter parish had Father Cyr Dubé as its first pastor. After his untimely death on June 16, 1959, at the age of 45, his successors as pastors were Fathers Rino Albert (1959-1971), Étienne Dubé (1971-1975), Alfred Ouellet (1975-1979), Napoléon Michaud (1979-1984), Lewis Long (1984-1991), and Bertrand Ouellet (1991-1995). Father Normand Godbout has been the pastor of this parish of 2128 faithful in 663 families, since August 15, 1995.

A HAPPY YEAR 2000 JUBILEE!

To mark a parish's fiftieth anniversary is like reading over the wonderful book of the Acts of the Apostles in which St. Luke the Evangelist wrote down the works accomplished by the Holy Spirit in the first Christian communities who were of one heart and one mind, who were faithful to the teaching of the apostles, to the fellowship, the breaking of the bread, and the prayers. I shall long remember the February 26 Sunday gathering: a great crowd to welcome the Holy Spirit, a vast number of believers to accompany their youth on their journey of faith, parents and sponsors who implicate themselves as witnesses in the spiritual growth of their children, and pioneers who testify to their attachment to Christ Jesus and his Gospel. Such a Sunday gathering cannot help but stimulate Christian faith and illustrate how much we are the Body of Christ. The celebration attests that the Eucharist builds up the Christian community, as the 1999 Eucharistic Congress theme reminds us.

PARISH PASTORAL TEAM

At a meeting with the parish pastoral council we discussed the importance of helping the poor in our midst, especially through supporting the Grand Falls Regional Food Bank. We also talked about the necessity of parish- and home-based religious education, special places to learn about Jesus and his Gospel so as to celebrate better and better commit ourselves to him. In the name of the Mission given to every baptised and confirmed person, it behooves us to be, in our school, work, political or other environment, "leaven in the dough, salt of the earth, light of the world." A parish pastoral team becomes more and more indispensable, faced as we are with new spiritual and pastoral needs. As he is freed more and more of administrative tasks, the priest is among the people to proclaim the Gospel, celebrate the sacraments, lead in prayer and look after the spiritual formation of the community. The religious education coordinator, the person in charge of the church's charitable works, the economic affairs director, all could, in agreement with the Priests' Senate, form a parish pastoral team together with their priest.

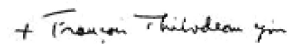
STEWARDS OF THE COMMUNITY'S GOODS

On Friday, February 25, I met with over 35 representatives of the Grand Falls Deanery's parish economic affairs committees. The meeting was, first, to thank them for all they are doing in their respective Christian communities, and to discuss together different aspects of their responsibilities: stewardship and administration, and the management of properties and buildings. It is fantastic to note the ever-increasing number of people who devote themselves so competently for their community. From the discussions it appears that we must aim at a greater collective management style rather than individual management. In this way, one person could look after the cemetery and related questions, another could be responsible for the maintenance of buildings, another could serve as bookkeeper, etc. In some parishes there are now more than ten people involved in this way, serving their community through the parish economic affairs committee (PEAC). I shall return to this question at a later date.

SAINT-GEORGES PLUS

Deeply grateful to the people of Saint-Georges Parish, I rejoice at the present and future collaboration with other surrounding parishes, especially in the area of religious education. May Saint George continue to watch over this parish, and may he give it a share of his strength and courage.

Have a good week!



+ François Thibodeau
Bishop of Edmundston

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