
SAINT LÉONARD-PARENT



On March 6 I had the joy of making a pastoral visitation to the parish of Saint Léonard-Parent. Pleasant surprises awaited me, there: the Parish Pastoral Council and the Parish Committee for Economic Affairs, in conjunction with their pastor Father Armand Plourde and their pastoral agent Mrs. Laurette Thériault, had arranged a full programme of activities: a visit to the parish church, whose sanctuary has been thoroughly renovated thanks to the wonderful talent of the local cabinetmaker, Mr. Gérard Poitras; visit to the Mont Assomption Seniors' Home, the Maison Oasis and the Foyer Rossignol; visits to the patriarch of the parish and his family, the Daigle Farm, the shut-in and a few businesses, all of which was followed by a community supper, a visit to the Marist Sisters who first came to Canada at the request of Msgr. Matthieu Mazerolle, and the Eucharistic celebration. My heartfelt gratitude to them all as well as to all the parishioners for their wonderful and friendly welcome.

MAJOR DOCUMENTATION

A pastoral visitation gives one the unique opportunity of learning about the various writings on the parish in question, thus helping one situate things in their proper perspective. It was in this way that I had the opportunity of reading over very interesting historical material on the parish of Saint-Léonard and its beginnings. A few of the sources are: *Histoire du Madawaska*, by Father Thomas Albert; *Bicentenaire de la Grande-Rivière Saint-Léonard et Saint-Léonard-Parent, 1789-1989*; the *Album souvenir* of Mrs. Nicole Caron-Malenfant and her group; *Calendrier du Bicentenaire de la Grande Rivière Saint-Léonard (Ville et Parent) et Van Buren (Hamlin, Keegan, et Cyr Plantation)*; *Grande Rivière: une page d'histoire acadienne*, by Jacques F. LaPointe; *Diocèse d'Edmundston, Album-souvenir du 50e anniversaire de fondation*; *Livre Souvenir Centenaire du Madawaska 1873-1973*; *Saint-Basile Berceau du Madawaska*, etc. These texts helped me better understand the settling of the Acadians along the Upper Saint John River, the socio-cultural and religious effects of the Ashburton-Webster Treaty, the names of the founding families, and major landmarks in the lives of the people.

A FEW DISCOVERIES

In this way I learned that in 1789 the families of François Violette, Pierre Hilarion Cyr, Joseph Cyr, Joseph Soucy and Augustin Violette were the first to settle along the banks of Grande Rivière. I also learned that it was Father Hugh McGuirk of Saint-Basile who in 1868 prepared the ground for the new parish by purchasing land from Abraham Coombes and a building from Jean-Marie Parent (the postmaster who gave his name to the village?). I also learned that the parish has given twelve priests and twenty sisters to the Church. I also read the names of the parish priests who served here: Fathers Louis Gagnon dit Belles-Iles (1896-1872), William Varily (1874-1875), Louis Alphonse Launière (1875-1903), J. Auguste Babineau (1903-1915), Antoine Comeau (1915-1924), Benjamin Saindon (1924-1932), Matthieu Mazerolle (1933-1957), Irenée St-Amand (1957-1973), Sylvio Thériault (1973-1980), Ronald Bellefleur (1980-1981), Bertrand Ouellet (1981-1983), Fidèle Poitras (1983-1984), and Narcisse Gagnon (1984-1994). The parish comprises 800 faithful in 205 families.

A COMMANDMENT

Just as in earlier reports of my pastoral visitations to the Grand Falls Deanery I dealt with the great themes of the Christian life, I want to present to you the witness of one who is committed in faith. The following words are from Father Armand Plourde, a man who throughout his life and even today has never shied away from committing himself to justice and peace issues. The following was spoken in 1979 at a graduation in Kedgwick, where he was parish priest, at the time: *We Christians have a commandment which tells us to love God a whole lot and our neighbours and everybody else as much as we love ourselves, to the point of giving up our own lives. It is even the only commandment that we need to live. But this 'love your neighbour' and 'let us love one another' must apply not only to us as individuals but especially, and more and more so, to all peoples, all groups, all communities. We must want for all countries in the world and for every race what we want for our own country and our own race. Yes, our commandment to love must be collective or it is only an illusion.*

ENVIRONMENT

And Father Plourde continued: *Your vocation is to teach us anew to respect ourselves a bit more so that we can come to respect nature, the animals, the trees, the fish. In our obsession for quick profits, our generation, because of its lack of discipline and moderation, has left depleted forests, and dirty, polluted and poisoned waterways. The waste of energy and food is an obvious sign that we are stupid exploiters of nature. All we need do is look at the way we are clear-cutting our forests, how so much wood is left to rot on the ground, and so little land is reforested. It is obvious that we love badly or not at all these natural riches of ours and our environment, by tolerating such a blatant massacre without qualm of conscience, with the comment that this is the responsibility of our company or our government.*

HAPPY EASTER TIME

May this Easter time be conducive to the building up of our Christian communities. May it inspire us to love one another according to the divine Command, through social commitment in the name of our faith, through the ongoing transformation of our milieu.

+ François Thibodeau

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Bishop of Edmundston

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