
« EYES FIXED ON JESUS »



This is the title of my 1999 Pentecost pastoral letter, which deals with the paths to the future of our Christian communities. For the sixth consecutive year I write such a letter, but this time I would like to examine with you those avenues now open to us to carry out in the world the mission given us by Jesus. But allow me before all else, in this year dedicated to God the Father, to offer you these recommendations of St. John Eudes to the baptised, the confirmed, and the ordained.

EXHORTATION

“Let us adore the Father who sends His Son into the world, and Jesus Christ who sends his Apostles as the Father has sent him. Let us give thanks to our Saviour for coming among us, for giving us his Church, and for giving us a share in his mission. Let us ask his forgiveness for having neglected our mission, for having acted by ourselves and not as his messengers. Let us dedicate ourselves to him so that he may fill us with his missionary Spirit which is always at work in his Church.” [Congrégation de Jésus-Marie, *Manuel de prières (extraits)*. Paris: CID-Éditions, 1989, page 24]

LET US EARNESTLY PURSUE THE MISSION OF JESUS IN THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT

Before disappearing from the sight of his apostles, Jesus gave them a beautiful and challenging mission: *“All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have taught you. And remember that I am with you always, until the end of time.”* [Matthew 28:19-20]

A MISSION THAT IS BEGINNING

In one of the most beautiful encyclicals he has written, Pope John Paul II affirms: *“The Mission of Christ the Redeemer, which is entrusted to the Church, is still very far from completion. As the second Millennium after Christ’s coming comes to an end, an overall view of the human race shows that this mission is still only beginning and that we must commit ourselves wholeheartedly to its service. It is the Spirit who impels us to proclaim the great works of God.”* [“The Mission of Christ the Redeemer.” Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris missio... on the Permanent Validity of the Church’s Missionary Mandate*, Sherbrooke, Éditions Pauline, 1991, N^o. 1]

A NEW MISSIONARY ERA

On this day feast of the Pentecost, 1999, let us welcome the Holy Spirit in us and in the midst of our community in order to proclaim with the Apostles God’s wondrous works. Let us gratefully and trustfully welcome these words of the Holy Father: *“Today, as never before, the Church has the opportunity of bringing the Gospel, by witness and word, to all people and nations. I see the dawning of a new missionary age, which will become a radiant day bearing abundant harvest, if all Christians [...] respond with generosity and holiness to the calls and challenges*

of our time. Like the Apostles after Christ's Ascension, the church must gather in the Upper Room 'together with Mary the Mother of Jesus' (Ac. 1:14), in order to pray for the spirit and to gain strength and courage to carry out the missionary mandate. We too, like the Apostles, need to be transformed and guided by the Spirit. On the eve of the third Millennium the whole Church is invited to live more intensely the mystery of Christ." [Redemptoris Missio, N^o. 92]

A NEW SPRINGTIME

Missionary vitality has always been a sign of the Church's vitality. Vatican Council II, and closer to us, the Edmundston Diocesan Synod (1987-1990), and the vast pastoral restructuring operation taking place have had but one object: to focus our attention on the mission of Christ, to discover and rediscover the mission wind which blew over the populace, that first Pentecost, and which continues its work in this new springtime of the Church.

TO PROCLAIM JESUS

Pope John Paul still urges Christians to be concerned for the billions who do not yet know Jesus as Saviour of the world. The missionary motivation belongs to the very nature of Christian life. Even newly-evangelised Churches become evangelisers in turn, showing in this way that we cannot tell others what we have not heard about the Risen Jesus. I rejoice in the fact that over thirty of our own people are in foreign lands proclaiming the Good News of Jesus: may they inspire our own witnessing to Jesus in the midst of our local communities. The mission must be lived both here and elsewhere; a daunting and demanding task awaits us in our own communities, to proclaim Jesus and his Message of Life.

PRESENCE OF THE RISEN ONE

The mission to evangelise which the Risen Lord gave to his Church is followed by confidence based on his promise to continue to abide and act among us. This mysterious presence of Christ in his Church is its guarantee of success in carrying out its task. Throughout the Apostolic Exhortation he addresses to the faithful in America, at Mexico City on January 22 of this year, Pope John Paul invites us to a new evangelisation of the world, and evangelisation that is "*new in its ardour, methods, and expression.*" [Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in America*, Ottawa: Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1999, page 112, N^o. 66]

A MISSION THAT IS ALWAYS NEW

The greatest importance must be given to parish-bound religious education: special attention must be given to the poor, the sick, the young and the elderly. Special attention also must be given to families in our milieu, especially those families with serious problems. These and similar hopes were expressed to me by people throughout the diocese. This establishes our mission in concrete terms, the mission we have to remind others of God's love, build up the Body of Christ, proclaim the Risen Christ, and work at building up the Kingdom of God with Jesus inaugurated.

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« From A Bishop's Journal » (284) (30 June 1999)