
A PILGRIMAGE ON YOUR BEHALF



I shall be in Rome with my brother bishops of the Atlantic Provinces for our *ad limina* visit from September 17 to October 1. All bishops heads of dioceses are asked to make once every five years a visit "to the threshold" of the tombs of the apostles Peter and Paul, to show in a concrete way their communion with the Holy Father and the universal Church.

A TIME FOR PRAYER

I shall be undertaking a real pilgrimage on your behalf to Rome's four major basilicas: St. Peter, St. Paul, St. Mary Major, and St. John Lateran, the Pope's own cathedral as bishop of Rome. To kneel in prayer at the tombs of Peter and Paul is to return to the source of the mission given by Jesus to his apostles. Peter and Paul are Christianity's giants, pillars of the faith and martyrs who had so much love for Christ that they gave up their lives for him. They continue to inspire and support the leaders of the Church today.

ST. PETER, THE POOR FISHERMAN

Before achieving holiness, Peter went through tough times. A fisherman from Galilee, he was one of the twelve Jesus had chosen to preach, with power to cast out demons. He was one of Jesus' confidants. Peter felt himself unworthy to be in the presence of Christ. Frightened from walking on the water, he began to sink, and Jesus reproached him his lack of faith. Peter could not accept that Jesus would one day suffer, be sentenced to death and be crucified before entering into glory. Nor did he want to have his feet washed by Jesus. He was amazed that Jesus would ask his disciples to forgive as many as seventy times seven times; he was amazed at the requirements Jesus set regarding marriage; and he became pensive when Jesus talked about the danger attached to possessing riches; and despite his promise to accept prison and even death rather than deny his Lord, he denied three times knowing him. He did not have the strength to watch and pray one hour, at Gethsemani; and at the time of Jesus' arrest, he abandoned him by running away. He even doubted the resurrection, unwilling to believe the witness of mere women who claimed to have seen the Risen Lord.

ST. PETER, A MAN OF FAITH

Still, it was on Peter that Jesus founded his Church. Peter was the one who proclaimed that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of the living God. It was Peter who, with James and John, witnessed the transfiguration. It was to Peter that the keys of the Kingdom were given, and it was to him that Jesus said to "*go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.*" [Matthew 28:19-20] It was by way of this winding road that Peter became a saint. He confessed his love for Jesus and strengthened his brothers and sisters in the faith. He broke bread in memory of Jesus, preached repentance in the name of Jesus, witnessed to the fact that it was better to obey God than mere humans; it was he who baptised the first Gentile converts. He was sent out to all the nations, and shed his blood for love of Jesus.

A TIME TO EXCHANGE

Meditating on the life of St. Peter invites us to look at our own spiritual journeys, to look at the mission which Jesus gives us, and the infinite love surrounding us. The same also holds true with St. Paul, the impetuous, scholarly, passionate man in the cause of Jesus and all the churches. He is the one who said, "*Who will separate us from the love of Christ? If God is for us, who can be against us?*" [Romans 8:35, 31] The time dedicated to prayer and celebration will therefore be most important. It will also be a special time to meet His Holiness Pope John Paul II, successor of the Apostle Peter. According to the regular programme, the Pope likes to have each bishop concelebrate the eucharist with him in his private chapel, to meet with him in private audience for a few minutes, and to share a meal with the bishops of Atlantic Canada in order to talk together. I remember my first "ad limina" visit of November, 1993. I was pleasantly surprised and moved by the Holy Father's deep concern for me, barely two weeks after the announcement of my appointment as bishop of Edmundston. It was at that time that he gave me the pectoral cross I wear, and I often recall the ties of communion that bind me to the Pope and the universal Church.

A TIME TO MEET

Last March I replied to a questionnaire sent by the different Roman Congregations regarding the state of our diocese. Despite the large number of dioceses worldwide, answers to the questionnaire are taken seriously and carefully studied, if we judge by the personalised letters I received in return. The Roman trip gives us the opportunity to talk with the cardinals, archbishops or bishops in charge of the different Vatican offices, congregations, and councils. The Atlantic Bishops' meeting carefully prepared the questions to submit to these different offices. These talks are very beneficial and make us realise the urgency of setting pastoral priorities for the new evangelisation of the world. The bishops, both as a group and individually, can also talk about the positive and negative events in their own ministry.

SOLIDARITY AND HOPE

I want to tell you how much I count on your prayers during these blessed days, and how I shall be deeply united with you in the company of Peter and Paul. May the Virgin Mary and her divine Son bless us abundantly! *God's love is from age to age!*



+ François Thibodeau

Bishop of Edmundston

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