
AD LIMINA VISIT (2)



In my previous article I wrote about the many visits and meetings there were in Rome, for us bishops of the Atlantic Region. This *ad limina apostolorum* visit to the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul is first and foremost a pilgrimage with significant time allotted for prayer and celebration.

PERIODS OF FERVENT PRAYER

We celebrated the Eucharist every day. What a grace to celebrate at the tombs of Peter and Paul! While Cardinal Aloysius Ambrozic of Toronto presided the mass celebrated at St. Peter's tomb and recalled why Jesus had chosen his apostles to be with him, I was privileged to preside the mass being said in the basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls and to invite each brother bishop to bring to mind, as a sign of gratitude, a sentence or writing of the Apostle to the Gentiles. *"Who will separate us from the love of Christ?"* (Rm. 8:35) Celebrating with the Holy Father was a high point of this pilgrimage of ours: at Castel Gandolfo [The Pope's summer residence, outside Rome] we were all of us, together with the Shepherd of shepherds, united in a common faith and hope.

MEETINGS WITH THE POPE

Despite his advanced age and state of health the Holy Father met with each one of us personally and individually in private audience, and then we were invited to have a meal with him. To each one of us he gave a pectoral cross specially designed for the year 2000. In the course of this exceptional time with him I expressed to the Holy Father all the affection, gratitude and prayerful good wishes of our diocese. He questioned me on the diocese's over-all situation: the priests, sisters, seminarians, pastoral agents, and lay people. He reminisced on his 1984 visit to Canada and extended his apostolic blessing to all in the diocese. At lunch he once again commented of the parish situation, religious practice, and vocation ministry.

ADDRESS

On behalf of the bishops of the Atlantic Region Bishop André Richard of Bathurst thanked Pope John Paul II for his warm welcome and stated that the eleven Atlantic Region dioceses comprised some 900,000 faithful. *"Our ministry is faced with many challenges,"* Bishop Richard said. *"Our society is experiencing rapid changes. We are challenged regarding how to present the Gospel message to a people seeking for meaning in their lives while being confronted with death-dealing forces and attracted by the power and riches. We are concerned about the demands of our population and the small number of religious and priestly vocations. In our affluent society many poor people demand help and solidarity from Christians, where public organisations seem helpless. At the dawn of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, we profess our attachment to Christ Jesus and implore his holy Mother to grant us the courage to respond with a "Yes" filled with love."*

MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER

In a message he gave us Pope John Paul II pointed out the mutual ties that bind us together; he reminded us of the greatness of our pastoral mission and insisted on the complementarity and communion between priests and lay people by referring to the teaching of Vatican Council II on the priesthood of believers and the ministerial

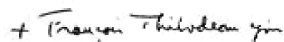
priesthood. *"It is important that priests be 'set apart' and 'servants,' the former being a condition of the latter. If the priest is not clearly set apart he will not be able to carry out the service demanded of him by the Church. If he is not a true servant he will live an empty and barren solitude which is foreign to a true pastor. The complementarity of the distinct vocations of priest and lay person must be the framework within which efforts are made to gather together the forces of the Church for the new evangelisation in Canada. The pastoral ministry of priests is meant in no way to stifle the initiative of lay persons or to reduce them to passivity and dependence. Rather, lay witnessing must be encouraged, which will make the Church more effective in the midst of the world, and will raise up many good priestly vocations."*

RESOUNDING CALL

From his inaugural address of October, 1978, to his Apostolic Exhortation on the Church in America, it is the same resounding call which the Pope makes. *"Open! Open wide the doors to Christ! Open to his saving power the frontiers of countries, the economic and political systems, the vast areas of culture, civilisations to Christ: he alone knows the heart of man."*

TURNED TOWARD THE FUTURE

At the end of this visit to Rome and at the very dawn of the year 2000, it is with even more love for Christ and complete fidelity to the Church - like Peter and Paul - that I want to pursue with you the mission passed on to proclaim among us the Gospel of Jesus and to repeat how great the love of the Lord is, from age to age. Steady in fighting for Christ, let us follow the path of life with the strength of the Spirit. On the morning of October 2, coming back home, as the Church was celebrating the feast of our Guardian Angels, I read the following in the breviary: *"There is no journey to the sources which is not led by the angels, and no combat against the powers of darkness which they do not support with the power of their might. There is no waiting in the night which they do not envelop with their silence, nor any walk to the dawn of day which they have not planned and along which they do not go before us."*



+ François Thibodeau

Bishop of Edmundston

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