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## BE MESSENGERS OF JOY, ALLELUIA!

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Nearly four months have elapsed since the opening of the jubilee year 2000, since our entry into this year of blessings granted by the Lord. I bid you take on the same sentiments which were in Jesus, proclaiming such a year of the Lord's favour for all humankind, and truly welcome deep within you this extraordinary grace of the Jubilee. *"Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing"* (Luke 4:21). What can this scripture mean to our people today?

### UNFORGETTABLE MEETINGS

In the course of my pastoral visitation of the Edmundston Deanery I had the pleasure of meeting a good part of the population, a population most respectful and dedicated to their Church, their bishop, their priests and future priests, their pastoral agents and newly-organised pastoral teams. I met with youth and elders who share the same faith, the same hope, the same charity, truly united in what is the foundation of our faith: the person of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world. I met several people carrying heavy burdens, heavy crosses, oppressive suffering. People crippled with age, wounded by life, by illness, by the loss of loved ones; people damaged by poverty, unemployment, and social ostracism; people with hearts afire, unbounded generosity, unequalled kindness; people socially, politically, culturally, and religiously committed. I met them all, though limitations of time often cut short these most important and useful visits.

### INSTRUMENT OF PEACE

It was for all of them that the Lord proclaimed a year of grace, a year of the Lord's favour. My hope is that in those special moments, through this humble instrument which I am, and through my episcopal ministry, my visitation was a special occasion for encountering the presence of Jesus of Nazareth come to bring us the good news of salvation. In my prayers for those I was about to visit I often asked the Lord never to be an obstacle along their path but rather an instrument of peace and joy, of harmony and reconciliation.

### IN THE MIDST OF DAILY ACTIVITY

It was in a spirit of faith that these days were experienced, just as it was in faith that the people of Nazareth welcomed the prophet they were barely getting to know and acknowledge. Wasn't he the carpenter's son? And weren't all his relatives living among them? What was it that could make this one man stand out from all the rest in the village? What moved him to proclaim a year of the Lord's favour? It was really in a spirit of faith that these first contacts were being established between Jesus and his countrymen of Nazareth. The great mystery of the incarnation had been announced to the Virgin Mary by an angel. There were perhaps some among them who knew about the fact that Mary had visited her cousin Elizabeth, that Mary had given birth to her son in Bethlehem, that Mary and Joseph had had to flee to Egypt before returning to Nazareth; nothing of the happenings in Bethlehem and Jerusalem had yet been recorded, except what had passed from mouth to mouth... It was much later, inspired by the holy Spirit, that the words and deeds referring to the life of Jesus would be remembered and that the grand mission of Jesus, inaugurated in the synagogue of Nazareth, would be understood.

It is truly in the midst of very ordinary daily activity that Jesus proclaims his mission, it is truly in the midst of daily occupations and preoccupations that Jesus proclaims what would henceforth overturn the whole of humankind: good news to the poor, sight to the blind, freedom for the oppressed, joy to mourners, a year of the Lord's favour for humankind. *"Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."* For three years, day after day Jesus will repeat this good news. And today, the Risen Jesus reiterates the same message of joy and peace through his Holy Spirit and his Church.

## **A MESSAGE OF JOY**

It is this same message that I have sought to bring to our people throughout my visitation: in their work places, schools, places of leisure, of worship, and health care facilities. Two [French] songs which could best express the prayer which has accompanied this visitation are: *"You are there in the midst of our lives, and your presence animates us; you are there in the midst of our lives, very much alive, O Jesus Christ!"* And: *"Father, I am your child, with a thousand proofs of your love for me; I want to praise you with song, the song of joy of my baptism."*

## **IN THE MIDST OF OUR LIVES**

Through these special encounters I sought to affirm in each and everyone their dignity as men and women, their dignity as children of God. My aim was to tell them - and not only at confirmation services - that the Spirit was with each one of them. Just as the Holy Spirit rested on Jesus, so does this same Spirit of God rest on each baptised person, each confirmed person, each ordained person. We have much worth in the eyes of the Lord.

## **MAJOR COMMITMENTS**

At the Chrism Mass held in the Saint-Jacques parish church those present were invited to renew their commitments to Christ and his Church. This was for those involved a moment of the Lord's favour of the Jubilee. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the newly consecrated holy oils were made special means of salvation; they accompany the gestures of Jesus on behalf of his people: oil of catechumens, oil of the sick, holy chrism. Through the power of the Holy Spirit these oils are bearers of the grace of Christ to his people. May we ourselves be bearers of the grace of Jesus. May Saint Paul's instruction always reach us: *"We urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. For he says: At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on the day of salvation I have helped you. See, now is the acceptable time; now is the day of salvation!"* (2 Cor. 6:1-2)

Brothers and sisters I love with a bishop's heart, welcome this great grace from the Lord. May the Year 2000 jubilee be a year of great grace, especially since we are having a new ordination, May 20. The Holy Spirit is upon you, be always and everywhere messengers of joy! Happy Easter!

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