
PASTORAL VISITATION TO NOTRE-DAME-DES-SEPT-DOULEURS (2)



It was a privilege for me, April 9 to 14, to do the intensive pastoral visitation of the parish which welcomes me unfailingly time after time, as it is within its territory that the Diocesan Centre and bishop's residence have been located since 1971. After having talked about the many activities which took place April 9 - celebrations, community meal, confirmation, meetings- I would like to tell you what the week was like.

MEMORABLE VISITS

In expressing my thanks and gratitude to the pastoral team which planned and organised the visit, and in thanking all those who welcomed me so warmly, I can only briefly mention all the moments of grace I experienced April 10, 11, 12, and 14 of this year, without forgetting the March 8 visit to the Forum and the April 18 Mass at the Edmundston Regional Hospital, with bereaved people: breakfast at McDonald's, visit to the Centre Brunswick, to Accueil-Grossesse, Le Lien, the Cité des Jeunes Regional High School, IPL Plastics Ltd; coffee at Tim Horton's, visit to the Journal Info-Mag Weekend newspaper, IGA, visit to several home-bound persons, the charismatic prayer group, the École Notre-Dame; breakfast at Bel-Air Restaurant, visit to the Shermag Mill and Imperial Enterprises; lunch at the Praga, visit to the Foyer Belzile and Paul Hébert Homes, the Centre de Rénovation Landry, WHK Woven Labels, the JML Shirt factory, the Msgr. Numa Pichette Residence, the Domrémy Centre, UTANO [Elders' University of the Northwest], Escale Madavic, the Rue du Centenaire Community Centre, the Salon de l'Ami du Quilleur, the Edmundston Campus of the Université de Moncton, Radio Station CFAI, the Convent of the Filles de Marie-de-l'Assomption Sisters, and the Centre Sérénité. A heartfelt Thank You for this extraordinary visit.

LOOK AND LISTEN

Visiting so many people and organisations has allowed me to get to know really better the people in their own work and living environments. I constantly felt this sense of welcome from them, tinged with respect and simplicity. Questions are asked, facts are stated, problems raised: family values, right to life, right to respect, mental health, integration in society, spousal violence, violence against women, ongoing formation, intergenerational relationships, relations between the Church and one's milieu, religious education, pastoral ministry in schools, work relations, team work, regional economy, situation of the poor and needy, social communications, the meaning of suffering, cultural heritage, etc. These are but a few of the questions raised at our meetings, and they deserve reflecting on.

CHALLENGING LETTERS

It is with interest that I read the letters of all who ask for Confirmation, they are a sign of the seriousness of their faith and their degree of preparedness. Here are a few excerpts: *"I want to receive the sacrament of Confirmation: it is very important to me. I do not know too many things about the Holy Spirit, but I know that he is always close to us. I had never thought of praying for my confirmation but I will now do so; I shall pray for you who are our bishop, and for the Edmundston Diocesan Church in a special way, for the eight hundred young people who are preparing to live this sacrament."* *"To be confirmed is to get closer to Jesus by wanting to do good around us with the help of the Holy Spirit."* *"To be confirmed is to receive the Holy Spirit in my heart*

to carry out the mission of Jesus." "To be confirmed is to receive the Holy Spirit, the gift of God. The gift I believe is the most important is the gift of counsel because it helps me make good decisions which help me live as a true Christian." According to the young themselves the preparatory meetings to their Confirmation were good occasions to recall the basic qualities and values of their Christian life, such as respect for others, patience, honesty, love, and the importance of practising them in their daily interpersonal relationships.

CHILDREN'S PRAYERS

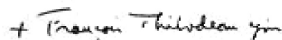
At Notre-Dame School I was given a prayer notebook; the prayers are simply beautiful. Listen: *"On my lips I have planted a smile as warm as the summer sun, and I offered it to those I came across today! See, Jesus, I have set to work as you have asked me!" "When I am full of goodness, when I console those who are sad, you are there, Jesus! You are there, Lord Jesus, very close to those who give their love!" "Peace isn't easy! we have to speak together, after having had words with one another. We must look at one another, after the anger is passed! After a kick, we must shake hands! We must meet together after having split up! Lord, it isn't easy! Give me, I ask, the courage of peace!"*

A LONG LIFE

According to those in charge of the Université du Troisième Âge - the Elders' University - aging in health is the challenge of the Third millennium. Actually in Canada 12% of the population is 65 and over; in 2036, it will be 25%. In Atlantic Canada, the population ages faster than elsewhere in the country. Active elders have better health and contribute more to society. Despite these statistics, sociologists note the absence of a "culture of longevity" and the "powerlessness of structures" now in place, to modify this archaic model; our society continues to act as though one's so-called "active or productive" life ceased at retirement.

MOVEMENTS AND ASSOCIATIONS

In the evening of April 14, at the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, I had the joy of meeting the members of several organisations and associations of the Edmundston Deanery: Brebis de Jésus, Centre Sérénité, Knights of Columbus, Ladies of St. Ann, Development and Peace, Famille du Sacré-Coeur, Femmes Chrétiennes, Daughters of Isabella, Faith and Light, Guides, Nouvel Horizon, Gospel Sharing, Relais Solitude Myriam, Charismatic Renewal, Scouts. On behalf of the Diocesan Church and in my own name I want to thank all of them for what they do in our milieu. They contribute to the vitality of our milieu and respond to the needs of others according to their age and condition. Mrs. Marie-Mae Cyr, coordinator of the religious radio programme *Au rythme de l'Église*, expressed the wish of promoting one or the other organisation or service in weeks to come.



+ François Thibodeau
Bishop of Edmundston

« From A Bishop's Journal » (336) (21 June 2000)