
"LET THE SPIRIT BURST FORTH!" (4)



In this year's Pentecost pastoral letter I pointed out a few wonders which the Spirit has worked among us. Let us recapitulate them together.

JUBILEE ACTIVITIES

While numerous Jubilee activities are unfolding in Rome - ecumenical jubilee celebration, artists' jubilee, workers' jubilee, etc. - several others are taking place or will take place in our milieu. It was in this way that throughout the diocese the opening of the Holy Year was marked in simplicity and hope at the threshold of the new millennium. On Good Friday, the Way of the Cross was observed in several places in solidarity with those who suffer. A sacred concert composed of the four Restigouche parish choirs performed marvellously, the second Sunday of Easter. The Bishops of New Brunswick's May Day pastoral message was favourably received by the population. For several people, the World March of Women against injustice and poverty is an important event of the year 2000. On September 27 all the priests and future priests of New Brunswick are invited to St. Michael Basilica in Miramichi City for the Priests' Jubilee. Other initiatives will surely be taken in the months to come in our parishes and deaneries, to mark "the 2000 years of proclaiming the Good News."

A PRESENTATION OF CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

On Sundays before Lent, pastors were invited to talk about the sacrament of marriage as best they could. I had sent them five statements on the following topics: greatness of human love, miracle of Christian marriage, mission given to married couples, eventual problems of married life, and declarations of nullity of marriage. These five statements were published in full or in part in the local press or parish bulletins; in some instances they were given to future couples as topics of reflection. Our marriage preparation services, both French and English, was very supportive of this pastoral initiative; these services were awarded the 1999 Bishop Roy Prize. I felt it important that in these times of uncertainty and of questioning regarding the institution of marriage, in this period of indifference, cohabitation without benefit of sacrament, separation and divorce, to restate the mission of the Christian couple in the Church and in the world. Marriage and family ministry must reach couples preparing for marriage and those who are already well along the difficult and demanding, delicate and excellent road of marriage.

PASTORAL VISITATIONS

On March 8 I undertook my fifth intensive pastoral visitation, this time to the Edmundston Deanery. I was really concerned whether I would be able to undertake one, this year, that would be as intensive as the other four, with its diversified and demanding programme. Thanks to God, thanks also to the parish pastoral teams, I was able to carry out this wonderful visit to the seven parishes involved throughout the Lenten season, this year, by dedicating nearly twenty-five continuous days to this particular pastoral activity. I thank God for all I experienced, this year as in preceding years, during these pastoral visitations. They are a true gift of the Lord in the course of which I was given the opportunity to meet a good part of the population, a population very respectful and devoted to the Church, to its bishop, priests and future priests, pastoral agents, and newly-formed parish pastoral teams. I had the opportunity to meet with both young and old who share a common

faith, a common hope, a common love, who are truly united in the very foundation of our faith: Jesus Christ, Saviour of the world.

A FRUITFUL DIALOGUE

I was able to meet several people with heavy burdens, crosses, and sufferings to bear, persons wounded by age, life, illness, and bereavement; persons marked by poverty, unemployment, and social exclusion. I met with people in the thick of things, people of boundless generosity, of limitless commitment; people who are socially, politically, culturally, religiously committed. It was a good cross-section of our population that I visited and listened to, but time was often too short to allow these important and beneficial meetings to be pursued in length. These meetings would generally lead to discussions of particular situations: labour conditions, housing for the elderly, place of religion, religious education and pastoral ministry in our schools, the passing on of values, right to life, the place of the marginalised, rights of the handicapped and the sick, etc. In other words, the question was about the reign of God being constructed among us daily.

REASON FOR THE VISITATIONS

Throughout these visitations my one concern was to bring the message of Jesus to our people, in their workplace, schools and recreation areas, churches and health institutions. These words of Vatican II were constantly with me: *The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted, are the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community of people united in Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit in their pilgrimage towards the Father's kingdom, bearers of a message of salvation for all of humanity. That is why they cherish a feeling of deep solidarity with the human race and its history.* [Gaudium et Spes, 1. In Austin Flannery, Gen. Ed., "Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents... in Inclusive Language." Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Co., 1996, page 163] My aim at these meetings was to remind each one of their dignity as children of God. I wanted to reiterate that not only at Confirmation but in the very midst of life the Holy Spirit rests upon each one of us. Just as the Holy Spirit rested on Jesus, this same Spirit of God rests on each baptised, confirmed, and ordained person.

EDMUNDSTON PRESBYTERIUM

In coming among you in January, 1994, I had before me the recommendations of the Diocesan Synod; more than that, I had before me 42 diocesan priests and 15 religious priests who were ready and willing to collaborate generously according to their means, in promoting the Kingdom of God; I am very happy to have met and to still meet this strength of soul and heart in our presbyterium. I count more than ever on the diocesan and religious priests to day after day vitalise, with the grace of God, our diocesan Church. I count more than ever on each one of them. I trust that they be men of prayer, men of God; nothing can diminish the ministry we accepted at ordination, neither age nor fatigue, nor illness, nor social or ecclesial changes. I count on their having the stamina to continue to be faithful in faithfully celebrating the mysteries of Christ, especially those of the Eucharist and of reconciliation according to Church tradition, for the praise of God and the sanctification of the people of God. I trust that they wisely carry out with dignity the ministry of the Word by proclaiming the Gospel and teaching the Catholic faith. I count on each and everyone of them to serve and guide the people of God under the direction of the Holy Spirit. Convinced that the same Holy Spirit animates our Church, it is with constant zeal that we must serve it. The Spirit himself will produce in us fruits of peace, unity, joy, and hope.

TOWARDS A CHURCH-AS-COMMUNION

In the midst of the countless changes we have experienced these past few years, the Holy Spirit was there; he was even ahead of us. Is it not the same Spirit who inspired the Fathers of Vatican Council II to promote a true Church-as-communion? The forty years or so which have elapsed since the announcement of the Council in 1959 resemble the long march of the Chosen People across the desert: there are striking similarities. But what is even greater is "God's time" given to help us to fully live as a Church the present moment. Our youthful Church was able to pick up many challenges and go ahead, without always knowing the outcome of the journey... This was true even before the creation of our diocese... Without the persistent and humble intervention of Sister Maillet on September 18, 1876 with the Bishop of Montréal, what would have become of the foundation of the Religious Hospitallers at Saint-Basile? What would have been the state of health services in our milieu? Without the opening of Saint Louis College in 1946, what would have happened to [French] higher education in this part of our province? Without the perseverance and enthusiasm of parents and families, what would have happened to the Christian faith in our midst? Without the apostolic zeal of our predecessors and of today's valiant pastors, what would have become of our Church?

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