
SOLIDARITY, FIDELITY, AND MISSION



Once again I want to express my solidarity with women who on this very day and throughout the world, are marching to the United Nations in New York and in the streets of our own city of Edmundston; many of them are marching against violence and injustice against themselves and other women. I once again thank all those who are marking an anniversary of commitment whether in marriage, the religious life, or the priesthood. And finally, I want to point out World Evangelisation Sunday.

SUPPORT FOR THE MARCH OF WOMEN

On March 8 of this year I publicly stated my solidarity with and support for the World March of Women, to eliminate violence and injustices perpetrated against them. At that time I called on the population to support this vast operation as one of the major events of the Jubilee Year 2000. The World March marks an important moment of gathering together and showing solidarity among the catalysts for social change. The demands are primarily focussed on questions of poverty and violence. Inequality between men and women, especially, single mothers. The non-consequence of domestic work contributes to this impoverishment of women. As long as we do not value women's contributions to society justly, this inequality will be insurmountable.

WEAK ECONOMIC POWER

The New Brunswick Advisory Council on the Status of Women reports that in 1996 women in full-time work earned 64% of a man's wages. According to the New Brunswick Committee on the March of Women, the poor economic power of women has negative repercussions on society in general: a gap in the general revenue as well as in pension earnings, the feminisation of poverty, increase of dependence on social programmes, an increase in women's health problems, and a reduction in the general economic prosperity. According to the same committee, the situation of New Brunswick women is similar to that of their sisters in the rest of the country. The New Brunswick courts report studying the cases of 509 women victims of aggression in 1996. Sadly, transition houses for battered women remain full and there is more and more violence among youth. Of 800 New Brunswick adolescent girls answering a survey, 22 % stated having been the victim of psychological or physical aggression while dating, and 19 % reported forced sexual relations. Half of the Canadian women have experienced at least one episode of violence since the age of 18. In 1997, victims of family violence represented 17 % of all acts of violence reported by 179 police stations in Canada. Girls represent 79 % of victims of sexual violence at home and 55 % of physical abuse. From 1978 to 1997, 1485 women were murdered by their spouses.

CHALLENGING SITUATIONS

How can we not be challenged by these cries against injustice and poverty? Considering the struggles engaged in our milieu by these women of honour, heart, and faith, let us remain united in heart and soul with these thousands of women who take to the streets as pilgrims of peace, justice, and non-violence. March on! With you, I hear these words of Jesus, « Rise up, you the non-violent! Rise up, you who thirst for justice! Rise up, you who suffer from poverty! You are the beloved of God! »

A MAJOR ANNIVERSARY

In this Jubilee year I rejoice with you at all the marvels which the Lord has worked for you; the words of Robert Lebel's song come to my mind,

Filled with admiration for so much love,
How can we, Lord, express our joy?
You visit our days
To better draw us to you!

I commend you on your love, your eagerness, your enthusiasm, your fidelity in living day to day your commitment to the Lord. I give thanks with you for the love and fidelity which the Lord himself continues to show you. He is as close to you as on the first day of your commitment, he is near you and he grants you his strength and grace in abundance.

May the Lord continue to bless you, may he grant you joy and health, and give you many more years as a sign of love and hope. Truly, for you the love of the Lord is from age to age! Happy commitment anniversary!

MISSION SUNDAY

On October 22 I ask you to think of our brothers and sisters who are devoting their lives to other Churches throughout the world, especially our thirty missionaries from this diocese. The recent arrival of Father Joseph Phaku Mavambu of the Boma diocese, Democratic Republic of the Congo, to our diocese challenges us to rethink our sense of mission. It is true Church solidarity that urges us to share the Gospel with everyone. The first missionary is Jesus himself who was sent by the Father to walk with us; this event took place two thousand years ago, and the Jubilee Year 2000 marks this extraordinary sending-forth. And just as Jesus was sent, that he was "missioned", he in turn sends us to proclaim the Good News of the Father: God so loved the world that He gave us His only Son. Faithful throughout the world are invited to pray for the missions and make an offering in a spirit of fellowship in solidarity with Missio Canada, formerly known as the Office for the Propagation of the Faith, an aid organisation for all the Church's missions. The primary aim of this Mission Day is to develop the missionary awareness of God's people, both as individuals and as communities. The mission is a truly marvellous, grand and lofty undertaking. May our prayers go with those whom the Lord calls to this, and may our prayer, joined with that of St. Theresa of the Child Jesus, the great patron of missions, and our action, in union with those of St. Francis Xavier, contribute in spreading the mission of Jesus among all peoples.

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