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## WHAT WILL OUR LENT 2001 BE LIKE?

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Lent, 2001 starts today. My wish for you is that it will once again be a most profitable and remarkable period of grace, a time of penance and reconciliation given to us to better unite us to God and to our brothers and sisters, a time of solidarity with the deprived of the world, and in solidarity with Development and Peace with its Share Lent campaign; a time, also, of thanksgiving and gratitude for everything the Lord accomplishes in our world, especially within our diocesan Church, a time for reflecting on God's Word which is alive and effective. A time, finally, for deepening our understanding of what we become through the sacraments.

### « CATECHUMENATE »

Lent also marks the beginning of what we call the « catechumenate »: a special period when those who want to become Christians earnestly prepare with their sponsors and the participation of the Christian community, to receive at the Easter Vigil the three sacraments of Christian initiation: baptism, confirmation, and Holy Eucharist. In our Diocese, nearly every year there are men and women who prepare in this way to become Christians, at Easter. I invite you to pray in a special way for them so that they respond to God's call. I also pray for those who were baptised at birth but have never been confirmed. I pray for those who do not partake or who no longer partake in the Eucharist. These three sacraments are closely linked; they are the ones that form our Christian being. Why couldn't our fast of the year 2001 be a special opportunity for us to discover or rediscover these three sacraments? This could lead us to recognize God's gift in our own lives, to deepen our understanding of how we are enfolded in His marvellous love, and to respond anew to God's call to holiness.

### INITIATION

In a world and a millennium where excellence is everywhere required, it is not surprising to learn that it is necessary to put in time and effort if we are to succeed in any profession or trade. Several organisations and associations submit themselves to strict admission/initiation guidelines. For people who want to become Christians, a period initiation is proposed, a period of purification and illumination, and a time of celebration. The new ritual for Christian initiation reminds us of the richness of such a preparation. In a way, it is the entire Christian community which is mobilized by this intensive sacramental preparation of the Paschal sacraments: presentation and admission of candidates, signing with the cross, election, interrogations, scrutinies, Word and prayers, presentation of the symbol of faith, presentation of Lord's prayer, ritual of the Ephetha, choosing of a Christian name, anointing, profession of faith, celebration of baptism, confirmation and Eucharist, and mission. It is truly a rediscovery of the deep meaning of the gestures involved and the commitments made.

### GRATITUDE

I once again want to gratefully thank all those who devote themselves to sacramental preparation: they are people who do a lot for their community; they contribute to the building up of our Church, along the years. We may not have a « catechumenate » as such with its own rites and schedules, yet we have times and places of sacramental preparation. It may sometimes happen that the connection between these sacraments is not always evident: for instance, we do not readily recognise that confirmation – especially when it is not

celebrated within the Mass – is closely linked to the Eucharist. Sometimes one chooses sponsors who themselves have not even been confirmed, a requirement not only of Church legislation but of the nature of sacraments: it is the “initiated”, that is, the baptised themselves who have been confirmed and who receive the Eucharist, who can initiate other Christians.

## **WE PRAY TO THE LORD**

In the new Ritual for Christian Initiation there are beautiful prayers which express very clearly what is being experienced in every sacrament. I would like to share one with you, the Prayer for the Elect [Cf. Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*. Revised ed. Ottawa: Concacan, 1987. Pages 96-98] for the third “scrutiny”: notice the doctrinal richness of each intention!

Let us pray for these elect whom God has chosen. May the grace of the sacraments conform them to Christ in his passion and resurrection and enable them to triumph over the bitter fate of death.

That these elect may be given the faith to acknowledge Christ as the resurrection and the life, we pray to the Lord;

That they may be freed from sin and grow in the holiness that leads to eternal life, we pray to the Lord;

That liberated by repentance from the shackles of sin they may become like Christ by baptism, dead to sin and alive for ever in God’s sight, we pray to the Lord.

That they may be filled with the hope of the life-giving Spirit and prepare themselves thoroughly for their birth to new life, we pray to the Lord;

That the eucharistic food, which they are soon to receive, may make them one with Christ, the source of life and of resurrection, we pray to the Lord;

That all of us may walk in newness of life and show to the world the power of the risen Christ, we pray to the Lord;

That all the world may find Christ and acknowledge in him the promises of eternal life, we pray to the Lord;

That we too at Easter may again be confirmed in our hope of rising to life with Christ, we pray to the Lord;

That the whole world, which God has created in love, may flower in faith and charity and receive new life, let us pray to the Lord.

Have a wonderful journey to Easter! And a Good Lent 2001!

+ François Thibodeau

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Bishop of Edmundston

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