
« LIVING WITH THE HEART » (1)



On Pentecost, June 3, I published a pastoral letter entitled *Living with the Heart*. For the next few weeks I would like to give you some excerpts.

I want to reflect with you on the 2000-2001 pastoral year, as well as on what our beloved Church might experience in the months to come. I make this reflection with Saint John Eudes as our guide, since he is eminently able to inspire our pastoral plan. St. John Eudes (1601-1680), spiritual father of the worldwide Eudist religious family left his mark not only on the religious life of France but also on that of the Church in North America and this, from the very beginnings, since several of our first missionaries knew this priest writer, preacher, and teacher.

In remembering St. John Eudes I want to express on my own behalf and on behalf of the Edmundston Diocesan Church our gratitude to all the Eudists who worked and ministered here, to those who are still with us in ministry, and to those whose family roots are here. As far back as 1904 the Eudists were here, ministering in Southern Victoria, in the Tobique. They were the first priests in Plaster Rock and the first resident priests at Maliseet. Over one hundred fifteen Eudists worked and taught at St. Louis College, over a period of twenty-five years. We still have with us Father Eymard Duguay ministering in St. Jean-Baptiste and in Notre-Dame-des-Prodiges parish in Kedgwick, Father Claude Côté, at St. François d'Assise, Clair, St. François-Xavier in St-François-de-Madawaska, and Notre-Dame-du-Rosaire, Connors. There is also Father Ernest Dumaresq at St-Léonard-Ville, St-Léonard-Parent, and Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes. Father Aurèle Godbout, provincial superior of the North American Eudist Congregation, also pursues his work at the Centre Sérénité in Edmundston; and I who am your bishop am now in my eighth year among you.

MARVEL

On this feast of the Holy Spirit, how could we not marvel at all that the Holy Spirit is and at everything He has accomplished in our Church, all these weeks and months? How I wish that we say of us what was said of the Apostles and early disciples who had just received the Holy Spirit: «Each of us hears them speaking in his own tongue about the marvels God has accomplished!» (Acts 2:11) This amazement can only come from a grateful heart. How I wish that in the wake of the Acts of the Apostles we could express in our own terms all that the Holy Spirit has wrought in our Church! How I wish that each member of our Church could write about God's goodness on his or her behalf!

SONG OF PRAISE

For his part, Saint John Eudes, whose 400th birthday we celebrate, wrote a song of praise and thanksgiving to the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary for their manifold blessings. Born in the village of Ri near Argentan in Normandy, France, November 14, 1601, he was ordained a priest December 20, 1625. His aim in life was to make of it an ongoing hymn of gratitude to the Hearts of Jesus and Mary.

My soul glorifies the wonderful Hearts of Jesus and Mary, and my spirit rejoices in this infinite Heart which is in me! Yes, Jesus and Mary have given me their Hearts that I might live only in their love.

He has worked marvels for me, holy is his heart; he took me from my mother's womb. The depth of my mother called forth the depths of his mercy.

This most gentle Heart has always filled me with sweet blessings. He has sheltered me in the palm of his hand, and protected me like the apple of his eye.

He has chosen me to be his priest, he has placed me in the ranks of the princes of his people; he placed his words in my mouth, and made my mouth a two-edged sword.

He made me die, he made me live, he has always accompanied me on my path; he fought off my enemies and delivered me from evil.

Oh Hearts of Jesus and Mary, furnace of love, may our hearts be kindled in you for ever! May they remain in your flames, and may they make one heart forever with the Hearts of Jesus and Mary!
[From the Prayer Book]

After each verse, students in Eudist colleges, universities and major seminaries, as well as people in Eudist parishes, answered: « *Gratias infinitas inenarrabilibus donis ejus* » – “Everlasting thanks for his wonderful gifts”.

OUR THANKS

In taking time to look at our own lives, we too could sing such a hymn of praise, a song of thanks for the wonderful gift of life, for the gift of a warm human family, for the benefits of health and work; a song of thanks for the gift of the earth and a country to call our own; a song of thanks for the gifts of baptism and the other sacraments, for the gift of God's Word, and for the Church. Yes, we give everlasting thanks for these wonderful gifts!

AT THE HEART OF THE JUBILEE

The year 2000 Holy Year launched us along the road to a new millennium. It was a holy year commemorating the 2000th anniversary of the birth of Jesus our Saviour and Liberator, God-with-us. So many wonderful graces were showered on us during this holy period, especially the wonder of wonders, our personal encounters with Jesus himself in his Word, his sacraments, his Church, and in our neighbour: “Jesus yesterday, today, and forever!” Let us consider how much we have advanced in the past months, and we shall discover Jesus' own footsteps. Did we not in our daily pilgrimage meet Jesus, as we visited the sick or had a neighbourly chat, or during a liturgical celebration or in parish- or family-based religious education, at difficult moments in life as well as in days of joy along with the ordinariness of daily living? St. John Eudes was seized by the love coming from the Heart of God; he had been given the supreme gift of His love, in his encounter with Christ.

+ François Thibodeau

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Bishop of Edmundston

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