
« LIVING WITH THE HEART » (6)



In my Pastoral Letter, *Living with the Heart*, I reviewed the 2000-2001 pastoral year in the light of the teaching and actions of Saint John Eudes whose 400th birthday we are celebrating this year. Among his deeds we can list the creation of five major seminaries for the appropriate formation of pastors, confessors, and preachers.

QUALIFIED SHEPHERDS

Like Jesus who had pity for the crowds “because they were tired and worn out, like sheep without a shepherd” (Mk. 6:34), Saint John Eudes wanted to give the Church many qualified priests. Contacts he had with people on his parish mission rounds made him aware of how urgent it was for him to help reform the clergy: and so it was that he founded a seminary at Caen in France. To do this he left his Oratorian community at Caen, of which he was the superior, and on March 25, 1643 he, along with a few other fellow priests, founded a congregation which, besides giving parish missions and retreats would look after the spiritual and doctrinal formation of priests and candidates to the priesthood. During his lifetime he founded five seminaries and a college. At the time of the French Revolution, the Eudists were in charge of over fifteen seminaries. At the request of the Archbishop of Halifax the Eudists came to Canada in 1890, and in 1895 they founded Holy Heart Interdiocesan Seminary, to give the Atlantic region of Canada numerous priests and bishops. Like Saint John Eudes, the directors of these seminaries never stopped reminding their subjects of the greatness and dignity of the priesthood. « The priest is a living image of Christ, and so he must be clothed in Christ's holiness. » Our diocesan seminary which was founded August 4, 1995 wants to continue giving our Church holy priests. For the last six years, our pastoral formation service has been involved in the training of competent pastoral agents who, with the priests, minister to our Christian communities in both the French and English sectors. The aim of parish pastoral teams is to give our Christian communities qualified leadership rather than having only one person – the priest – carrying the burden of Christian leadership.

MANY WRITINGS

Saint John Eudes composed many works for priests, preachers, pastors, and confessors.

Oh priests, [...] you are the eyes, the mouth, the tongue, the heart of the Church of Jesus; better still, you are Jesus' very eyes, mouth, tongue and heart. You are his eyes. It is through you that the Good Shepherd continually watches over his flock. [...] You are his mouth and his tongue. It is through you that he speaks to his people. Through you he continues to preach the gospel that he preached in person when he was on earth. You are his heart. Through you he imparts life: the life of grace on earth and the life of glory in heaven to all the true members of his body. [...] [Memorial of Priestly Life, in Lectionary Proper to the Congregation of Jesus and Mary. Charlesbourg, Québec., 1989, p. 125] A priest is truly another Christ living and walking on earth. He takes Christ's place, represents his person, acts in his name and exercises his authority. [Memorial of Priestly Life, in Lectionary... p. 128]

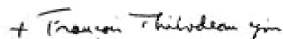
What is a pastor after God's heart? He is a real father to God's people, with a heart filled with truly fatherly love for his children. That love prompts him to work unceasingly to nourish his flock with the bread of the sacred Word and of the sacraments, to clothe the faithful with Christ and the Holy Spirit, to enrich them with all possible advantages regarding their eternal salvation. He is an evangelist and

an apostle whose chief work is to preach, both publicly and privately, by word and example, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is to continue and perpetuate the functions the Apostles were commissioned to perform, and to practise the virtues they practised. [...] He is a living image of Christ in the world, the Christ who watched, prayed, preached, catechised, worked, went from town to town and village to village, suffering, agonizing, dying and sacrificing himself for the salvation of all the souls created in his image and likeness. [Memorial of Priestly Life, in Lectionary... p. 141]

MISSIONARY SUCCESSES

Thinking about the many retreats which were held in the diocese, the three-day retreats, the novenas and sessions of all kinds that took place; when I think of the adult religious education programmes, the spiritual renewal programmes, the “missions” that were held in the wake of our Diocesan Synod, I am reminded of one of St. John Eudes’ letters – nearly 250 of which are preserved in the Eudist Archives in Paris – where he writes about the success of one of the nearly 200 “missions” he himself preached in his 55 years of ministry. The letter, dated July 23, 1659, is a summary of what was done at these missions, of the crowds gathered, and of the problems met. A mission could last anywhere from 15 to 45 days. His letters give us a better idea of what led him and the members of his Congregation to be “evangelisers-formators”. Could his letter inspire us for a new evangelisation? If it can evoke nostalgia for great crowds, it can also encourage us to work in base communities and parish community cells, where perseverance and learning are the order of the day.

I cannot begin to tell you about the blessings which God has showered on this mission; it is something prodigious! I have not been preaching inside the church for a long time, now; despite the fact that it is large, it is still too small for the occasion. I can honestly say that on Sundays more than fifteen thousand attend. There are twelve confessors, but I do not exaggerate by saying that fifty would be kept quite busy. People come from eight to ten league [A league is four kilometres] around, and hearts are so touched by God that all we see are the tears and the weeping of the poor penitents. The fruits which the confessors see in the tribunal are wonderful. But what is painful is that we shall not be able to confess more than a quarter of the people. We are overwhelmed. The missionaries come across some people who have been waiting as many as eight days and who will still not be able to go to confession, who throw themselves at the confessors’ feet wherever they meet them, pleading with tears and folded hands for them to hear their confession. It is now six weeks that we are here. Missions are such a great good, and so very necessary! [Letter of St. John Eudes to M. Blouet de Camilly. Tr. LG]



+ François Thibodeau
Bishop of Edmundston

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