
WOMEN OF FAITH (2)



At their recent diocesan congress, the Daughters of Isabella asked me to introduce them to different categories of women of faith, which I gladly did. I started by introducing them to our mothers, and by reminding them that they, too, are women of faith; I asked them to look at themselves as such. I also suggested that they look on their neighbours and their forebears as women of faith.

YOUR NEIGHBOURS

The third category of persons of faith I suggest you consider is that of your neighbours... those who are close to you, those who are around you. Look at them with eyes of faith, and this look of kindness, of affection and faith... can arouse in you more faith, hope, and joy. Come to think of it, I suggest that you look at your neighbours with God's eyes, a gaze of faith which gives wings to our love.

I remember that in 1992, the year before my appointment as bishop of Edmundston, I animated a parish mission with Father Armand Chouinard in the parishes of St. Leonard and St-Léonard-Parent, during which we often sang the following, as we contemplated the beautiful mosaic in the church:

The Father's gaze on our days, a source of joy;
The whole world is but one cry: Alleluia!

The outbursts of truth are known to the heart of God
The bird flying to you drinks in the light.
The movements of renewal are known to the heart of God
The child's excitement is a bearer of our joy.
The movements of freedom are known to the heart of God
Our springtimes are attached to the budding trees.
The movement of our tasks are known to the heart of God
The worker's effort prepares your return.

The Father's gaze on our days, a source of joy,
The whole world is but one cry: Alleluia!

OUR PIONEERS

The fourth category of women of faith I would like to offer are those women who have left their mark on our sacred history, the history of our Church. They are teachers, politicians, businesswomen, religious like Sister Fernande Bédard whose statue we see in front of the church. There are also women of faith like those who

blazed new trails, like Antonine Maillet who became one of the first women university chancellors. She brings to mind another Maillet, Sister Maillet who was one of the very first Religious Hospitallers to work in our diocese, a woman of extraordinary faith. The letter she wrote 125 years ago come September is an act of exceptional faith. The Sisters had been living in abject poverty for over three years and preparations were being made for their return to Montreal. It was then that Sister Maillet, after much prayer, wrote to Bishop Bourget of Montreal. I recommend that you read this letter often, a model of trust in divine Providence, so full of courage, so filled with faith in God, in her community, and in those confided to her care. But for this letter, I fear that the community would have returned to Montreal: you can imagine what would have become of Saint Basile and our diocese, then. Sister Maillet built several wings of the historic convent: she even build a kiln for baking bricks; with inexhaustible faith she set the whole population to work making bricks... the Hôtel Dieu of Saint Basile was the first brick building in the entire Madawaska region. Sister Maillet: a woman to be remembered, a woman of faith, worthy of sainthood.

PIONEERS OF THE CHURCH IN AMERICA

The fifth category of women of faith are the mothers of our Church in New France, extraordinarily generous missionary women, the first to leave their beautiful country to open new paths to Jesus Christ in America. On May 4, 1639, three vessels – one of which was the “Saint Joseph” – weighed anchor at Dieppe with New France as destination. Aboard were the Augustinian nuns Mother St. Ignace (29 years old), Mother St. Bernard (28), Mother St. Bonaventure (22); there were also three Ursuline nuns: Mother Marie de l'Incarnation (40 years old), Mother Ste Croix (39), and Mother St. Joseph (23); there were also two lay missionaries, Mme de la Peltrie (36 years old) and Mme Charlotte Barre (18). They landed at Québec in New France August 1, 1639, after three long months at sea. Six years later Catherine de St. Augustin, 16 years old, came to New France where she toiled for twenty years, dying at the age of 36 on May 8, 1666... Extraordinary women, rightfully considered Mothers of our Church.

WOMEN OF THE BIBLE

The sixth category of women of faith I would like to mention are those we read about in the Bible; they have names like Eve, the mother of the living, and Sara, Deborah, Edith, Judith, etc., along with Mary Magdalen and the many women disciples of Jesus. From their group I present you the most outstanding of all, Mary, the Mother of Jesus.. At 16 years of age she accepted the mission which only a woman of faith and courage could accept. In his beautiful song, Robert Lebel sings her praise:

How do I deserve the joy that you, Mary, Mother of the Lord, come to me?

Blessed, most blessed are you who have believed.

Favoured, highly favoured, chosen of God!

Mary, you already knew that I also would give birth a first time.

The child I carry has moved at the sound of your voice, it has bounded with joy!

Look, the eyes of Zachariah are now glowing with sunlight.

You are truly blessed! Blessed, most blessed are you who have believed!

Favoured, highly favoured, chosen of God!

I would like to end with the words of the preface for the feast of saints: *You are glorified in your saints, for their glory is the crowning of your gifts. In their lives on earth you give us an example. In our communion with them, you give us their friendship. In their prayer for the Church you give us strength and protection. This great company of witnesses spurs us on to victory, to share their prize of everlasting glory, through Jesus Christ our*

Lord. May we in turn be women and men of faith!

+ François Thibodeau *in*

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Bishop of Edmundston

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