
« MY BELOVED CHURCH »



During this period of preparation for the Seventeenth World Youth Day, there is one topic that the young people must reflect on, and that is the Church, a vital subject we cannot sidestep. Since the World Youth Day event is promoted primarily by the Catholic Church for young Catholics, it appears normal that there be reflection on the Church. Ever since Vatican Council II defined the Church as “the people of God”, things have changed. The Church is no longer the business of “the Pope, bishops, and priests” but of all the baptised. As the song says, echoing the words of St. Peter: “Priestly people, royal people, assembly of the saints, people of God”.

A MISSION

There are many good reflection starters in the *Salt and Light* WYD 2002 handbook. For example, this is what it says regarding the Church’s mission: *“The first disciples had a huge mission: to bring out the best in each man and woman. To do this, they tried to live as Jesus taught them: to prefer service over glory, to give priority to the poorest among them, to gather in prayer, to not fear persecution, to forgive each other. This was and is the Church’s mission! Then, as now, these values went against the mainstream, which was more concerned with prestige, social status and power struggles. Today’s disciples follow the very same Jesus, who died and rose again. Filled with the Spirit, they form the new ‘people of God’, where everyone has a unique role to play. They want to free humanity from distress and to bring hope. They follow the path of believers who, throughout the ages, worked for the same goals: Francis of Assisi, Claire of Assisi, Benedict, Vincent de Paul, John Bosco, Marguerite Bourgeoys, Marguerite d’Youville, Jeanne Mance, and many, many more.”*

CONSTRUCTION SITE OR FOREST

I remember asking, at a pastoral workshop, to what the Church could be compared. Several answered that the Church was like a big family; besides, isn’t each family a “domestic church”, a cell of the Church, the basic cell? Others said that the Church looked like a vast construction site: all involved had responsibility for this Church being built. Another group had a different comparison: to them, the Church was like a forest. “Look at the extent of a forest: it is universal. The forest is made up of a variety and denseness of trees; in the same way, the Church is composed of a multitude of races, tongues, nationalities, and colours. The forest has the ability to renew itself, is limited to its own species, and is constantly changing. The Church has the capacity to reproduce itself, it is in constant evolution, and adapts to different customs, cultures and traditions. The forest is ablaze in beauty. If we know how to use it to its full potential, the forest will serve us for a long time. Where there is no discernment, the law of the jungle reigns supreme. The Church is beautiful, grand, and noble, it can discern those values that are life-giving, it can exercise judgement and reasoning.

WONDERFUL CYCLE

“The forest is in constant turmoil: cataclysms, natural disasters and destruction by people and by fire. The Church, too, periodically experiences major changes. The forest has an amazing power of revitalising itself, it has a wonderful cycle: seed, plant, fruit, food, return to the earth. The Church grows gradually to become a pilgrim people. The forest needs the help of man and woman in order to survive and grow; people need to

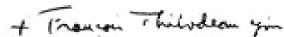
discover their Creator as a friend, a guide, a support, a saviour. Yes, the Church is like the forest before us, which we manage with care and keep open for all our brothers and sisters.” These words were from a group of forestry workers, lovers of New Brunswick’s beautiful and great forest.

“AND YOU, WHAT DO YOU SAY?”

Despite its youthfulness – the Church of Edmundston is only 58 years old – our Church is full of life: it is welcoming of others, men, women and children, a diversity of people who are united in one faith, one love, and one hope. And I find this Church more beautiful than a forest. Our Church holds great hope for the future, it reveals God’s mysterious presence, it nourishes us, and it can find room for our grandest dreams. This is my belief and my hope. But you, young people, what do *you* think of the Church? Do you consider yourself part of it, a full member? How do you show your faith in Jesus, day by day? How do you share in the Church’s life, on a daily basis?

AN URGENT PLEA

Pope John Paul II addresses these words to you, young people, as he repeats the words of Jesus: *“You are the salt of the earth, you are the light of the world. You are sentinels of the morning at the dawn of the new millennium. I call on you to prepare for the seventeenth World Youth Day. It will be an opportunity to meet Christ, to be witnesses of his presence in today’s society, and to be builders of the civilisation of love and truth.”* As for me, I urge you to actively participate in the mission of the Church according to your abilities and in those places where you live. Be close to others, to offer them real, deep friendship Be positive before others and regarding events: discover there the presence of God. Continue helping others by bearing with them the burden of the day. Take time each day for moments of reflection and prayer. With others, find ways of growing in your faith, hope, and love. Your parish community counts on you. Do not hesitate to offer your services to your community. The Church is young... with the youthfulness of its young people! I repeat the words of Pope John Paul II: *“Open! Open wide the doors to Christ! To his power of salvation, open the borders of States, of economic and political systems, the vast fields of culture, civilisation, and development. Do not be afraid!”*



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