
THE COURAGE TO START ANEW



In wishing you a happy and holy year 2003, I pray the Lord who is the source of every blessing to keep us in His grace throughout these 365 days! May He increase in us the virtues of faith, hope and charity. May the Spirit of peace accompany us always, and may He answer our prayers and lead us to everlasting joy! May we have always and everywhere the courage to start anew! It is not always easy to do over again day after day the same work, the same job, the same ministry; it really requires steadfastness, and this steadfastness is called the gift of strength, a gift which the Holy Spirit gives us in ample measure.

“POUR OUT YOUR POWER”

After receiving the laying-on of hands by all the bishops present, January 9, 1994, Bishop Gérard Dionne pronounced the prayer of consecration over me, the prayer making me a bishop: “Pour upon this chosen one the power which is from you, the governing Spirit whom you gave to your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, the Spirit given by him to the holy apostles, who founded the Church in every place to be your temple for the unceasing glory and praise of your name.” It is this Spirit who gives me the strength to accomplish day after day the wonderful ministry which is mine. Without this strength from God, it would never be possible for me to carry out this very demanding task. This ministry, while given to humans, is not cut to human dimensions: it is divine, apostolic. The words of Jesus often come to mind, “Without me you can do nothing.” I believe these words and Jesus’ abiding promise which he carried out by sending us his Holy Spirit, therefore enabling us to speak and act in his name.

SUFFERING, AT THE HEART OF THIS NINTH YEAR

It is therefore not uselessly that the Spirit is conferred on a new bishop: sooner or later he will experience the trials and suffering which come with the ministry. Other, unforeseen events will also weigh heavily, at times. I had not foreseen experiencing a ninth year of episcopal ministry the way it happened. Some may probably have foreseen the health leave I was forced to take following a near burnout, in February, but this sabbatical was not part of my schedule! March and April were therefore given up to rest and prayer, but also to the taking of resolutions for the future. Since May 1, 2002, I have been trying to put these resolutions to practice! I also realise that the success rate is not all that high! Without exaggerating what I had to go through during this period of exhaustion, I thought of different scenarios not only regarding my episcopal ministry, but also my life in general. Thanks to your support, your affection, and your kind prayers, I was given a glimpse of the Easter sunrise! The seed in the ground does not see the light of day in a matter of hours or even days... In close association with Jesus, I was also in intimate communion with all my brothers and sisters, especially those of our diocesan Church who experience illness and suffering. I experienced in this way the gift of strength given us by the Spirit of God. In the words of young people who are requesting confirmation: “The greatest gift I ask is the give of strength to help me through the hard times of life.”

SUBJECTS CONSIDERED

In recapitulating the subjects treated in my weekly “Bishop’s Journal” and which are like a snapshot of my pastoral concerns, four stand out in that they were the cause of much meditation and sharing with you: the

WYD 2002 theme, priestly vocations, mercy, and Christian funerals. If there is one topic I often meditated on during the year and shared with you no fewer than ten times, it was the one chosen by Pope John Paul II as the 2002 World Youth Day theme: "You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world." I wanted, first, to consider Jesus himself as being the true salt and the real light of the world: his will was to have us share in this great dignity and join in this magnificent mission. The Father's mercy being mainly the Good News brought to us by Jesus, it is important that we wholeheartedly welcome it. It also seemed pressing to point out the hope which necessarily is part of Christian funerals: it is this hope in the resurrection which makes our funerals specifically Christian. In the last Journal entry where I wrote the words of a new song: "I am going to my beloved Father, / There you will find me!" – I was asked whether I was preparing my own funeral! As a matter of fact each day brings us closer to the great Moment of intimacy with the Living God. As for priestly vocations, I was pleased to publish the Pentecost 2002 pastoral letter in which thirty-five priests of the Church of Edmundston sketched their vocation journey. The courage to start over again lies at the heart of all the situations related in these Journal offerings.

UNFULFILLED DREAMS

If the Church is but in its springtime, according to Pope John Paul II in his encyclical on The Mission of the Redeemer, the beloved Church of Edmundston is only fifty-eight years old! This is very young, in church terms! The recommendations made at the 1987-1990 Diocesan Synod are not all implemented. The four priorities adopted for the 2002-2003 pastoral year speak clearly about the road we must engage on with courage, the efforts we must still apply in promoting faith education at every level, especially family- and parish-based religious education of our children and youth, youth and family pastoral ministry, and in finding the financial resources required. We shall need much persistence, perseverance, and courage to make these dreams a reality.

"TWENTY-FOUR HOUR SERVICE"

May the prayer of my episcopal consecration, spoken by Bishop Dionne, be answered: "Father, you know all hearts. You have chosen your servant for the office of bishop. May he be a shepherd to your holy flock, and a high priest blameless in your sight, ministering to you night and day; may he always gain the blessing of your favor and offer the gifts of your holy Church. Through the Spirit who gives the grace of high priesthood, grant him the power to forgive sins as you have commanded, to assign ministries as you have decreed, and to loose every bond by the authority which you gave to your apostles. May he be pleasing to you by his gentleness and purity of heart, presenting a fragrant offering to you." And with you all, I hasten to answer: AMEN!

+ François Thibodeau

+ François Thibodeau, C.J.M.
Bishop of Edmundston

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