
A TRIBUTE TO FATHER BENOÎT BOSSÉ



In extending my best wishes to Father Benoît Bossé on the occasion of his first fifty years of pastoral ministry, I want to thank him on behalf of all my brothers and sisters of the Diocese of Edmundston for his faithful ministry in our diocesan Church. Last year, for my Pentecost pastoral letter I had the pleasure of publishing the vocation stories of thirty-five fellow priests, and Father Bossé's story was one of them. He ended the account of his vocation with these words: "Since [my ordination,] I taught at Université Saint-Louis in Edmundston for eighteen years and did weekend pastoral ministry; I was also assistant priest at Saint-Jacques for a year, and pastor of Saint-Thomas-d'Aquin Parish in Baker Lake for seventeen years. I am now retired, but help with occasional ministry. Allow me to say that I have never regretted answering the Lord's call." Rest assured that it is not today that he will start regretting this loving response!

PRIEST AND EDUCATOR

From the time of his ordination, Father Bossé was closely identified with the wonderful educational endeavour which Jacques Couturier writes about, in his remarkable book *Construire un savoir*. The Eudist Fathers' provincial superior had asked the bishop of Edmundston to free one of his diocesan priests for teaching chemistry. It was in this way that Father Bossé contributed to the establishment of higher learning in the Madawaska region of the diocese. Father even came to be identified as a Eudist father, by those around him! It is to his ministry as priest-educator that I want to address myself. I am convinced, however, that every priest has a special opportunity to exercise this outstanding ministry, albeit differently and outside the walls of scholarly institutions. In Father Bossé's days, being a priest-educator was an ongoing challenge, and continues so today. This education ministry was often justified by quoting from Saint Matthew's Gospel: "Go and teach them to carry out everything I have commanded you" (Mt. 28:19-20).

APPOINTED BY BISHOP MARIE-ANTOINE ROY

Father Bossé's teaching ministry at Université Saint-Louis is founded on the pastoral instruction published by Bishop Marie-Antoine Roy, dated March 22, 1946, where we read the following: "Education is one of today's burning issues. Parents who have benefited from it rightfully expect that their children enjoy the same privilege. Those who were deprived of higher education hope that their offspring fare better. Both groups, with few exceptions, insist on it as a value which is no longer contested. Youth, the budding flower of tomorrow, the flower and hope of a diocese, is also the prime material from which arise high quality Christians, zealous priests, and courageous leaders. All these aspirations are drawn to a fruitful future. One hardly needs to add that preparing for this requires a threefold diploma in respect, love, and scholastic aptitude, and a classical education satisfies these legitimate aspirations. Those privileged to have been educated in this way and who are therefore well equipped for life's adventure, are ready to enter into a quality career. Well aware that the task ahead will be long and difficult, they have acquired an ample stock of strength and virtue which they would otherwise be unable to get in the field. This capital of enrichment and development harmoniously blends the creative energies of the mind, correct single mindedness of the will, discernment of the spirit, distinction of heart, dignity of life and loftiness of thought, Christian habits reflected not only in personal action but also in mutual activity, especially in pride of faith. In other words, all the loving and acting strengths that form the man, the Christian, the apostle."

MAN, CHRISTIAN, APOSTLE

Throughout his eighteen years' ministry, Father Bossé contributed in fully training men, Christians, apostles. During the 1960-1961 school term, I witnessed his activity and also the fact that he was well liked by both my confreres and the students; this probably explains why he was the first priest in the Edmundston diocese to call me, at 7:00 A.M. on October 20, 1993, as soon as he read about my appointment as bishop, in the local newspaper. Far from putting a damper on Christian education, the Second Vatican Council published the declaration *Gravissimum educationis* on October 28, 1965, on the utmost importance of education and its ever growing influence on the development of modern society: "We firmly attest that the formation of youth and, to a certain extent, the ongoing education of adults has become easier and also more urgent, due to present-day conditions." Father Bossé has no need to regret what he sowed over an eighteen-year period. The university continues its task with new educators whose desire it is, so I have been assured, to pursue the vision of the university's pioneers, visionaries as they are called on the monument to the Eudists and the Religious Hospitallers of Saint Joseph, from whose scholastic enterprises the Université de Moncton's Edmundston Campus developed.

When the priests were present on campus, there were priestly vocations. Alternative ways will have to be found to pursue the pastoral ministry of then and now, to help the young university students keep contact with priests of the Church and with dedicated Christians in our milieu. However, wherever a priest is called to exercise his ministry, he is called to form through word and example, the youth of our time. If our forebears were bold enough to build colleges, universities, and institutions in the past which remain monuments to their glory, how much bolder should we not be in helping our young people who hunger for genuine values, and who seek to better know Jesus Christ so as to better love him, young people who search for – often very quietly – the genuine way of the Beatitudes?

PARISH MINISTRY

Father Benoît Bossé exercised his ministry in St-Thomas-d'Aquin Parish, in Baker Lake. I pay him tribute, as well as to all the confreres who work in parish ministry. The parish, too, is an institution which has experienced both high and low points, challenges to its very life and this, as often if not more than all other forms of institutions of learning. However, the parish continues to be an outstanding place for evangelisation and the exercise of charity and Christian hope. It is a great grace to serve our parishioners. We realise that this involves certain requirements, but we can each day be grateful for all those wonders which God is pleased to do in our parish communities. There is so much life, goodness, faith, and charity, there! In thanking Father Bossé for the witness of his priestly life, I wish him many days of happiness. May the ministry he now performs, however different it is, and especially his prayer ministry, continue to be a source of much happiness to him.

+ François Thibodeau

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

« From A Bishop's Journal » (492) (11 June 2003)