
2003: SPRINGTIME OF THE CHURCH



Today I want to share with you the homily I gave on May 18 at the Mass televised from the church at Saint-André, for the Radio Canada "Le Jour du Seigneur" programme. Inspiration for this homily is taken from the priest-poet Robert Lebel and, borrowing his words, I want to repeat that our Church is experiencing a wonderful springtime!

SPRINGTIME OF GOD

The Easter liturgy is truly beautiful. It reminds us how the Lord is present to his people, how we are as intimately united to him as branches are to the vine, that love is henceforth the new law of our community, and that the Holy Spirit is ever at work within humankind. Just as in the days of St. Paul, our Church continues to be built and to grow; it increases with the aid of the Holy Spirit. Despite appearances to the contrary, despite tensions and the ongoing threat of war, our beloved Church is living a most wonderful springtime! People of Saint-André, townspeople and country people, you know what makes springtime, in these parts. Before the beautiful fields of Madawaska County recover their blanket of green, there can be long periods of expectant waiting: to grey and drab days succeed days of sunshine to help sprout the seeds dormant in the soil. Both sun and rain are indispensable to the growth of our gardens and wonderfully productive fields. There are times when some days look more like fall than summer, because the sun has not reached its summer intensity. If we can idealise springtime and consider it a wonderful period of transition, we must not forget that the farmer and the gardener must learn patience and trust; it would be useless to force plants and seeds to grow faster, the harvest would suffer from it. Saint-André has the Centre of Excellence in Agriculture and Biotechnological Services for Eastern Canada. More than elsewhere, we know how important springtime is for successful and plentiful harvests.; without water, the potato could not reach maturity, it could not be the valued commodity we export all over the world. In his wonderful encyclical on the mission of the Redeemer, Pope John Paul II declares that Christ the Redeemer's mission which he handed over to the Church is still far from being achieved, that it is still in its beginnings, and that we must be thoroughly dedicated to it.

"EASTER, SPRINGTIME OF THE WORLD"

The parish of Saint-André is nearly one hundred years old. One hundred years may seem a long time, in the life of a parish, but compared to the Church's two thousand years, it is but a beginning. All the more is this true of your parish. Your community, like all our other Christian communities, is not a terminal patient, far from it! Your community wants to take the necessary means to ensure its growth and development. Like the first community of Christians, it wants to surge forth, in the power of the Holy Spirit. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the first colonists in Saint-André were mostly from the Québec region between Rivière-Ouelle and Trois-Pistoles; others came from Acadia. The beginnings were difficult and painful. People worked hard to clear the land, and they built a beautiful church. Empowered by its history, its effort, its struggles and its successes, your Christian community is experiencing an exceptional springtime. Every Christian, every baptised and confirmed person is called to consider what he or she has become, through the grace of God; every Christian is called to think about the requirements of discipleship with Christ, and to discover anew the depth of his or her faith and relationship with the Risen Lord, and his or her ties to the local community. The springtime which our Church is experiencing in our world will produce an unexpected harvest.: No one can predict what the Saint-André Christian community will be like, by the year 2010... All humankind seems to be in turmoil, but strong with th faith, charity, and hope of a disciple of Christ, we know that nothing will overcome this extraordinary power in the Lord.

“EASTER, SPRINGTIME OF THE HEART”

The Easter liturgy invites us to a springtime of the heart. This is the commandment of the Lord God: to have faith in His Son Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he has commanded us. The Risen Jesus is always there with his challenge for us to love one another as he himself loves us... This is the springtime of the heart which we must fully experience. In these days of global tension, Christ's disciples must more than ever show the world that they truly and sincerely love their brothers and sisters. The parish of Saint-André has always been known for the witness of its love expressed between couples, in families, and in vocations. It is only filial love that can help explain the many priestly, religious, and missionary vocations produced by this parish. People still remember Father Éloi Martin, the second pastor of Saint-André who died suddenly in Rome where he was attending the canonisation of St. Theresa of the Child Jesus, and who was an ardent promoter and supporter of priestly and religious vocations. And Father Félix Verret, the third pastor, is still remembered as the priest who died in the confessional in the very act of celebrating the sacrament of Reconciliation. Many more examples could be given to point out the qualities of the heart that are among you!

“EASTER, SPRINGTIME OF JESUS CHRIST”

There could be no springtime for the Church, without this springtime of Jesus Christ. Jesus better known, Jesus better recognised, Jesus better welcomed, Jesus better proclaimed to the four corners of the earth. Our springtime of Jesus Christ prompts us to better understand how Jesus is the true vine and we, its branches. He is our life, our strength, our spirit. We must realise that we are called to be saints of the third millennium. We are bid to live in faithful prayer, to listen to the word of God and share it with others, and to deeply live the sacraments of Jesus, especially the Eucharist and Reconciliation: this is the brightest promise of the springtime of Jesus Christ! Family-based religious education, which is being introduced in several areas of our diocese, is another source of hope for us. It is an unusual seed, and it will produce an abundant harvest. May our celebration today move us to be more and more zealous disciples of Jesus Christ, and to become more than ever builders of the parish community. If there was already talk in 1903 of this parish edifice which we still justly admire, we must become or become once again the living stones of Jesus Christ. That springtime is meant to bring about bright promises. The Church will be able to build itself and go forward confidently; it shall then multiply and grow with the aid of the Holy Spirit.

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« From A Bishop's Journal » (496) (09 July 2003)