
A TRIBUTE TO THE EUDIST CONGREGATION



On the occasion of the feast of St. John Eudes and of the centennial of the coming of the Eudists to the Lower North Shore of the St. Lawrence River, I am pleased to share with you my hymn of gratitude to them, which I published in my Pentecost 2003 pastoral letter on the consecrated life.

“PRAISED BE JESUS AND MARY!”

“The year 1643, Our Lord and his most holy Mother gave us the grace, through their special bounty, to establish our little Congregation on 25 March, the day on which the Son of God was made man, and the Blessed Virgin was made Mother of God.” It is in these words that Saint John Eudes (1601-1680) sets down in his *Memorial of God’s Benefactions* one of the most precious graces of his life. An author, apostle, and doctor of religious service to the Hearts of Jesus and Mary, he contributed, through his Missions and his seminaries, to the building up of the Kingdom of God. In this way he was one of the great artisans of Christian renewal in seventeenth-century France. John Eudes was but 42 and his six companions, between 35 and 45, when they undertook, in a rented apartment known as “The Mission,” the project they had presented in pilgrimage to Notre-Dame-de-la-Délivrande, 10-miles away. This apostolic project was the training of priests who would specialise in proclaiming the Word of God and in training future Gospel workers. With everyone in the Eudist family I feel that the founding of the Congregation of Jesus and Mary (C.J.M.) was truly a gift of God to humankind, a gift of the Heart of Jesus and of Mary, a gift that has always produced abundant fruit, even during the worst crises of our existence.

IN OUR DIOCESE

The Eudists have been in New Brunswick for over one hundred years. In 1898 they opened a college in Caraquet and started ministering throughout the Acadian Peninsula. In 1903 they even settled down in the actual territory of the diocese of Edmundston, at Tobique where they ministered to Maliseet and Plaster Rock. A new house was opened in 1912 in Bathurst, the Blessed Jean Eudes House which later became the Université Sacré-Cœur, following the fire which destroyed the college at Caraquet. In 1946 the Eudists founded Collège Saint-Louis in Edmundston. In the twenty-five years they served at what became the Université Saint-Louis, 116 Eudists staffed this first institution of higher learning in our region. This monument to the memory of these teachers will serve as a reminder to coming generations of the daring of these “visionary” educators. They are not forgotten, Simon Larochelle, Louis Cyr, and Roger Lizotte, as their names have been given to the buildings of the Edmundston Campus of the Université de Moncton, and to the hockey club. There were over forty Eudists born in New Brunswick, seventeen of whom are from the Edmundston Diocese. For over thirty years several Eudists have been doing parish work and preaching. In the course of this 2002-2003 pastoral year, two Eudists have the pastoral responsibility – with help from religious sisters and laypeople – of six parishes (Clair, Connors, Saint-François, Saint-Léonard-Parent, Saint-Léonard-Ville, Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes). Since 1989, a Eudist has been in charge of the Centre Sérénité Counselling Centre. In his great mercy the Lord has given me the pastoral charge of the Diocese of Edmundston; I believe that this wonderful mission, far from distracting me from my mission as a Eudist, anchors me in it even more strongly through proclaiming the Gospel and training and forming Gospel workers.

REACHING OUT

On 14 November, 2001, the four hundredth anniversary of the birth of St. John Eudes, I dedicated the chapel of our diocesan centre to the glory of this great saint. I did this considering the strong ties which bound the Eudist family and the Church of New France from the very beginning, especially those ties between Saint John Eudes and Blessed François de Laval, first bishop of Québec. I did this also in thanksgiving for the presence of the Eudist congregation in North America since 1890, and especially for the training given to several of our very own priests who studied with the Eudists at Holy Heart Seminary in Halifax (1895-1970). I also had in mind the appointment of two Eudists as third bishop and fifth bishop, respectively, of the diocese of Edmundston – remembering also our fourth bishop, who did his studies at the Halifax seminary and who gave the episcopal ordination to our actual bishop of Edmundston. I did this, finally, to thank the Lord for the wonderful work of Saint John Eudes and for his apostolic influence today. Saint John Eudes can still help the baptised of today discover their dignity as children of God and help at building up the Kingdom of Jesus, in areas as varied as the cultural, social, economic, and political. They are called to boldly blaze new paths for Christ Jesus. “Open! Open wide the door to the Lord Jesus! Do not be afraid!” Saint John Eudes can still inspire priests in their task of the new evangelisation, in the wonderful work of apostolic preaching, and in their ministry of reconciliation. Through his spiritual writings, Saint John Eudes can help all people, through his love of Jesus and his Mother. Wanting his spiritual sons to be missionaries of mercy by “bearing the misery of the most miserable,” Saint John Eudes moves us to search out our brothers and sisters who are affected by all kinds of misery, and to reveal to them through the example of our lives the greatness of divine mercy. In a very special way, Saint John Eudes wanted his spiritual daughters, the Order of Notre-Dame-de-Charité, to help young women in difficulty.

PRIORITY MINISTRY

In submission to the Spirit, Eudist share in the mission of the Church, sacrament of salvation for the world, through proclamation of the Good News, bringing liberation to captives, healing to the blind, and freedom to the oppressed. Filled with love of Jesus, John Eudes carried in his heart the distress and the needs of his brothers and sisters. He boldly blazed new paths for expanding the Kingdom of Jesus. It is in him that the members of the Congregation find their deepest inspiration. Following him, all strive to remain faithful to the covenant made with God through their baptism. Responding to the grace of their ordination, the priests strive to fully realise the ideal of holiness proposed by their founder, so as to become shepherds after the heart of God. (Constitutions, articles 12, 14, 15)

I express my deep gratitude to the authorities of the Congregation of Jesus and Mary for the Eudist presence in our beloved Church, and I invite my brothers and sisters to come as many as possible, to open new ways for the growth of the Kingdom of Jesus among us.

+ François Thibodeau

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