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## A TRIBUTE TO POPE JOHN PAUL II

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How is it possible to give an adequate tribute to Pope John Paul II for all he has accomplished for the Church and humankind, these last twenty-five years? Truly, how can one adequately express one's gratitude for the amount of work accomplished, for his many encyclicals and apostolic letters, his innumerable addresses and all his other writings; for his episcopal ministry in Rome and throughout the world, for the many bishops he has appointed, and for the millions of people he has met, visited, and welcomed? How can proper gratitude be expressed for this man burdened with illness and suffering, the indefatigable servant who always reaches beyond his own strength; for our extraordinary supreme shepherd, inflamed with zeal for Jesus; for this servant of servants who never tires of serving? Yes, how can we render just and adequate homage?

### GRATITUDE

I can only stutter, in attempting to express my gratitude. Words lack to express adequately my personal gratitude and that of the entire Church of Edmundston, to the Holy Father. And this is not through false modesty. This is why I am asking all of you to thank the Lord himself for the twenty-five years of Pope John Paul II's pontificate. On my part, today I want to highlight the three principal ministries of every bishop on behalf of the People of God. For this, I look back on my own episcopal appointment, on 20 October, 1993, and my first interviews with Pope John Paul II, on November 5, 6, and 8, 1993.

### TRUST SHOWN

It was on Thursday, 13 October 1993 that I heard about the mission given to me by the Pope. After a warm welcome by the apostolic nuncio who had asked me to Ottawa, I was simply told: "The Holy Father appoints you bishop of the Diocese of Edmundston, New Brunswick. Do you accept?" How could one refuse such a request unless one is in danger of death, or for other serious reasons? On my letter of appointment, the Holy Father wrote: "It is one of our main duties to make the best decisions to ensure the greatest spiritual welfare of all the faithful. Since our Venerable Brother Gérard Dionne is shortly to retire as bishop of Edmundston, we have deemed it prudent to send another shepherd to efficiently direct this Community. We therefore turned to you, beloved son, especially because of your well-known pastoral qualities, as the best qualified to serve as the new bishop of this diocese. That is why we choose you as bishop and shepherd of Edmundston. We consider the mission confided to you to be important. Hence you must always keep your eyes on the Gospel precepts and the other beneficial obligations which will indicate your love of the Saviour, so as to become more and more like him." These words of Pope John Paul always remain an important point of reference in my apostolic task.

### FIRST CONTACTS

On 5 November 1993, while the Atlantic region bishops were on their "ad limina" visit to Rome, I had the opportunity to join them and to concelebrate holy Mass with the Holy Father. During the evening he granted me a special, 15-minute, audience. The following day, 6 November, we were all invited to the Holy Father's table for a meal. It was at the end of this meeting that the Pope gave me the pectoral cross I have worn ever since, the cross reminding me of the bishop's threefold ministry to teach through proclaiming the Word, to

sanctify through celebration of the sacraments, and to govern as the first shepherd of a particular Church. In the middle of the cross is engraved a scene of Jesus' meeting with Peter: "Peter, do you love me?" And Peter's response of faith and love: "Lord, you know everything: you know that I love you." And Jesus' answer: "Feed my sheep!"

### LOVE GUSHING FORTH

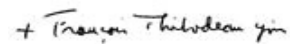
That is the source of the mission: from this unparalleled encounter with Christ Jesus, love gushes forth to inundate all apostolic activity. Without love, without Jesus' love, the bishop is nothing, as Saint Paul declares in his Hymn to love. On the other hand, everything is possible with love: there is no limit to love's forbearance, to its trust, its hope, its power to endure. This seems to me to have been the secret of Pope John Paul II's intense activity throughout the twenty-five years of his pontificate. It was because of his intense love of Jesus that he cried out, the evening of his election and again on his twenty-fifth anniversary: "Open! Open wide the doors to Christ! Do not be afraid! Open the doors to Christ! Open the borders of states, the economic and political systems, the vast areas of culture, civilisation, and development, to the saving power of Christ!" This was the programme he adopted as pastoral priorities and which he aimed to carrying out daily, both as bishop of Rome and as supreme shepherd of the Church.

### NEW EVANGELISATION

The Pope's words and writings have contributed to the new evangelisation of all humankind. He has brought the Gospel of Jesus to every continent. Like Christ, he has been and still is light of the world and salt of the earth. Through his numerous homilies, his many addresses, his publications and especially the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, he has aimed to bring the Good News of salvation to all people of good will. Through his trips around the world he has given a human face to the teachings of Vatican Council II. As a herald of the Gospel, he has never watered down the Christian requirements, while revealing Christian joy and hope. Enthusiastic about the liturgy, he highlights every day with the celebration of the sacraments. Early in the morning he celebrates the Eucharist with his guests in his private chapel, besides which he might have a two- or three-hour solemn celebration of the Mass. He takes all the time needed, attentive to both Word and Sacrament, attentive also to all who share in the celebration. He loves celebrating the other sacraments including baptism, marriage, and penance. He presides at priestly and episcopal ordinations. He is also very attentive to young adults in the faith and to the suffering.

### A UNITY WHICH TOUCHES HIM DEEPLY

Pope John Paul II has taken outstanding personal initiative in promoting true unity among all of Christ's disciples and among all men and women of good will. He has acted thus towards our brothers and sisters of other religious denominations, whether Christians, Jews or Muslims, and he ceaselessly challenges all to greater holiness, peace, solidarity, and justice. Conflicts both within and outside the Church have not been lacking, these last few years, and the Holy Father has not shirked his duty of calling to unity and exercising wisdom. In these days of gratitude may our fervent prayer for the Holy Father rise up to God!



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