
NEARING THE DIOCESAN PATRONAL FEAST



Monday, December 8, Feast of the Immaculate Conception, is the patronal feast of our Diocese, because in 1947 Bishop Marie-Antoine Roy, O.F.M., with the youth of our region in mind, petitioned and obtained from Pope Pius XII that Mary Immaculate be henceforth the patroness of the new Diocese of Edmundston which was founded December 16, 1944. Today I would like us to reflect on how the Virgin Mary is truly the Mother of our Church and how it is that she can help us reach our most cherished pastoral objectives.

A CONCISE AND MEANINGFUL PRAYER

In its beauty and simplicity, the liturgy introduces us to the wonders of God in words that are both concise and meaningful. For example, to celebrate the mystery of Mary, Mother of the Church, it addresses God the Father in this way: "By welcoming the Word in her immaculate heart, she conceived and gave birth to her Creator and prepared the beginnings of the Church. By receiving at the foot of the cross your Son's covenant of love, she gained as her children all who, through the death of Christ, are born to divine life. When the apostles were awaiting the Spirit you had promised, she joined her prayer to that of the disciples, and so became the model of the Church at prayer. Raised to the glory of heaven, she guides and protects the Church with her motherly love until the day of the Lord's glorious coming."

A PRICELESS TEACHING

This is a wonderful theological statement! It is a very moving prayer. It is a great revelation of the grandeur of Mary's mission. The Church – especially Vatican Council II – gives us such a priceless teaching, in its reflection on the Virgin Mary at the very heart of the Church's mission. I wish that all the baptised and confirmed, especially the Blessed Mother's friends, remember this theological, liturgical and catechetical statement. Rather than relying on private revelations, extraordinary apparitions, or contrary and even invalid messages, I call on the faithful of the diocese to become familiar with these sure words of the Church's magisterium, to the glory of the triune God.

CENTRING EVERYTHING ON CHRIST

Marian devotion that would not be centred on Christ or that would not have its source in the Gospel of Jesus would not be recognised authentic, by the Church. While leaving to the risen Jesus and his holy Mother the greatest latitude possible to work miracles according to their design, it is nonetheless important to discern their marks and authenticity. The Church alone has been given the power to authenticate such facts, as it is the Church's mission to lead one along the path of truth and life. That is why it is important to exercise discernment before "falling for" every new so-called message, however impressive it may be. Saint John of the Cross's statement, here, is worth its weight in gold: "By giving us, as He did, His Son, His only Word, He has in that one Word said everything. There is no need for any further revelation... Therefore, anyone who wished to question God or to seek some new vision or revelation from Him would commit an offense, for instead of focusing his eyes entirely on Christ he would be desiring something other than Christ, or beyond him.. God could then answer: 'In my Word I have already said everything. Fix your eyes on him alone for in him I have revealed all and in him you will find more than you ever ask for or desire'."¹

AT THE HEART OF OUR DAILY CONCERNS

After quietly receiving the prayer of gratitude which the Church offers us, to honour the Virgin Mary I want to offer to Saint Mary, Mother of the Church, the entire pastoral mission I bear as bishop of this Diocese. I do this in all confidence as I am certain that she looks after the Church, the Body of Christ, as she looked after Jesus, her own child. Everything I do for the Church, I do for Jesus. The Apostle Paul had the supreme revelation while on the road to Damascus, and all of his reflections and writings bear witness to this. By contemplating Mary as Mother of Jesus, we realise the extent to which she, who watched over her beloved Son, welcomed him in her heart at the Annunciation, who lived only for him and accompanied him to the cross – she who continues to watch over her Church can help us adequately engage in youth ministry. By contemplating Mary transmitting to her Son everything she knew about the Law, the “Torah,” the Holy Scripture, I pray to her that she help us in our catechetical ministry. By listening to everything that Jesus told us about his Father, by welcoming the Sermon on the Mount and by repeating his prayer, we discover in the Son what his Mother taught him. By contemplating how she accomplished her mission to Joseph and Jesus, I offer her all our efforts in family ministry. She was attentive to the Word of God before all else, and she desired with all her heart that God’s will be done in her. By contemplating Mary with Joseph searching for Jesus, I understand her concern for all of our families.

FORMING THE EVANGELISER

As I think about the mission that Mary accomplished towards Jesus, the apostles and the disciples, I understand even better how she can help us find and train men and women of the Gospel who may, one day, take charge of our Christian communities. As I consider everything that Mary was in the formation and mission of Jesus, the Good Shepherd and Sovereign Priest, I also discover how much Mary can help future priests along the path to the priesthood, to give their lives for their sheep. As I look at Mary intimately united to the sacrifice of her Son, I understand that she is here even today, accompanying and helping those who have the charge of God’s people. In the Upper Room Mary supported the prayer of the Church: may she obtain for us the grace of not shirking the duty of love which Christ has given us. Mary, witness of the true Life, shines like a ray of hope before the people of God on its journey to God. Happy diocesan feast!

+ François Thibodeau

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

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1. *The Liturgy of the Hours*, Office of Readings, Monday, Second Week of Advent, Reading 2.