
BUILDING THE BODY OF CHRIST TOGETHER



At the Blessing of the Oils on Monday, April 5, in the church at St. André, I invited the faithful to continue building together the Body of Christ and this, because of their baptism, confirmation and – for the priests – their ordination. We are carrying out Jesus' extraordinary mission: the Spirit of the Lord is upon us; he sends us to preach the Good News to the poor, proclaim liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and release to the oppressed, and announce a year of favour from the Lord. This passage from Scripture is still being accomplished today, in 2004!

IN DAILY EVENTS

It is in the midst of daily events that we are given the mission to proclaim this news to our families, our fellow workers and friends, to the sick, and to those involved in the political, social, cultural and economic life of our milieu. It is there, too, that the poor live, even in the margins of our society. It is there that we must bring freedom, light, and a year of favour. It is in the midst of these daily realities that we must live the message of the Beatitudes, and that we must be salt of the earth and light of the world. Through the blessing of the oils and the consecration of Holy Chrism, we proclaim that all the baptised, confirmed, and ordained are sealed with these oils for the mission they have been given in the Church. And this concerns both the healthy and the sick: we all have to open our doors to Christ, but we must also be "the good odour" of Christ. We must become more and more what we became at baptism: the Body of Christ.

BECOMING THE BODY OF CHRIST

"You have been baptised in the one Spirit to form one Body. The body is one and has many members, but all the members, many though they are, are one body; and so it is with Christ... You, then, are the Body of Christ. Every one of you is a member of it". (1 Cor. 12:12, 27) We all have to carry out our vocation in solidarity and communion with the whole Body of Christ. This is the great thing about the Body of Christ, that we all have a role to play, a unique mission to carry out, which no one else can fulfill. At baptism the following words were said to us, when we were anointed with the oil of catechumens: "We anoint you with the oil of salvation in the name of Christ our Saviour. May he strengthen you with his power, who lives and reigns for ever and ever." And then, with the Holy Chrism came the words: "God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has freed you from sin, given you a new birth by water and the Holy Spirit, and welcomed you into his holy people. He now anoints you with the chrism of salvation. As Christ was anointed Priest, Prophet, and King, so may you live always as a member of his body, sharing everlasting life." At confirmation: "Send the Holy Spirit among him (her) to be his (her) Helper and Guide. Give him (her) the spirit of understanding, the spirit of right judgment and courage, the spirit of knowledge and reverence. Fill him (her) with the spirit of wonder and awe in your presence." At the signing, these words were said: "Be sealed with the Gift of the Holy Spirit." When one of our brothers or sisters receives the anointing of the sick, he or she is told: "Through this holy anointing, may the Lord in his mercy comfort you with the grace of the Holy Spirit. May the Lord who frees you from sin save you and raise you up." And for the seriously ill, the following prayer is said: "Lord God, merciful Father, comforter of the suffering, look kindly on your son (daughter) who trusts in you. May this anointing ease his (her) sufferings, and may the food he (she) has received for his (her) journey, the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ, refresh him (her) and lead him (her) to life."

THE FULLNESS OF CHRIST

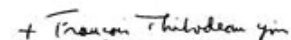
At my ordination as bishop, Bishop Gérard Dionne asked me whether I wanted to build up the Church as the Body of Christ and remain united to it within the order of bishops under the authority of the successor of the apostle Peter. This is the work I have been striving to accomplish daily, since my coming to Edmundston: to work at building up the Body of Christ. Saint Paul declares: "There is but one body and one Spirit, just as there

is but one hope given all of you by your call. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all, and works through all, and is in all. Each of us has received God's favour in the measure in which Christ bestows it... It is he who gave apostles, evangelists, pastors and teachers in roles of service for the faithful to build up the body of Christ, till we become one in faith and in the knowledge of God's Son, and from that perfect man who is Christ come to full stature." (Eph 4:4-7, 11-13) It was the same, at the ordination of my brother priests. The ordaining bishop asked them whether they were resolved, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to discharge without fail the office of priesthood in the presbyteral order as conscientious fellow workers with the bishops in caring for the Lord's flock; whether they were resolved to exercise the ministry of the Word worthily and wisely, preaching the Gospel and proclaiming the Catholic faith; whether they were resolved to celebrate the mysteries of Christ faithfully and religiously as the Church has handed them down to us for the glory of God and the sanctification of Christ's people; whether they were resolved to consecrate their lives to God for the salvation of His people, and to unite themselves more closely every day to Christ the High Priest, who offered himself for us to the Father as a perfect sacrifice; and (at the diaconate), whether they promised to live in communion, with their bishop, in respect and obedience to him.

LIVING IN COMMUNION

In order to carry out our mission as baptised, confirmed, and ordained members of the Body of Christ, we must first fulfill a condition, to live in communion with one another. As bishop, I must be in communion with Peter's successor as well as with my brother bishops, my fellow priests, and the whole People of God which is my flock. The same is also true of priests: there can be no true ministry without a real communion with one's bishop and with one's community. This is also the case for all the baptised: there can be no true love and real communion with one another, which we are all called on to live, in the Church. It is by the love we have for one another that we shall be recognised as disciples of Christ, and members of the Body of Christ.

I wish a Happy Easter to each and everyone of you!



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

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