
AVE MARIS STELLA



On this August 15, 2004, feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, I am united in heart and mind with my Acadian brothers and sisters as they celebrate the 400th anniversary of the coming of their ancestors to America. With them I sing their prayer of faith and gratitude, the hymn they adopted as their national anthem, over a century ago: “*Ave maris stella, Dei Mater alma, Atque semper Virgo, Felix caeli porta.*” “Hail, Star of the Sea, great Mother of God, ever Virgin, glorious gate of heaven.” I am deeply united to the Acadian people through family ties, since the Thibodeaus settled in Port Royal in 1654; also through the Eudist congregation whose members came to these parts in 1890; and through episcopal bonds since the Edmundston diocesan Church is closely tied to the Churches of Yarmouth, Moncton, and Bathurst.

YOUR STORY IS AN EPIC

A stroll through the Acadian Village in Caraquet takes us back in time to see what daily life was like, for the first Acadian families that came to America. “The Martin family lived here; the Cyr family lived here; the Godin family lived here.” Throughout this quick journey to the past we are introduced to these people who were so ingenious, brave, and courageous both in prosperity and in need. The *Défricheurs d'eau* spectacle recounts 400 years of history, with the greatness of its heroes, the people’s courage in times of want, their unshakeable faith, and their boundless strength in adversity. Nearer to us, the *Acadie en fête* spectacle recounts in song and dance the important aspects of the unfinished adventure of our Acadian fellow-citizens. The show recalls the heroic beginnings of the Madawaska region in 1785. We can be rightfully proud of our Acadian founding families, the Cyrs, the Daigles, the Fourniers, the Poiriers, the Ayottes, the Mercures, the Sansfaçons, and the Thibodeaus. Their faith and determination have left us this corner of our land, as their legacy.

BEARERS OF THE CROSS

Who could adequately relate all the hard times which our Acadian brothers and sisters experienced, during these 400 years? From the very first year they experienced illness and death. Were these a harbinger of the terrible events they were to suffer at the hands of the English in 1755, with the massive deportation which today would be called attempted genocide? We could already see the strength of character of those who lived through this tragic period. Nothing could keep them downtrodden. Theirs was truly a “tempered faith.” And this faith sustained them throughout their exile and their return to their homeland. We can proudly say that it was their faith in God that helped these men and women become a strong, courageous, and creative people. In the midst of their poverty and extreme want, in the midst of their suffering and even under threat of death, these Acadian sisters and brothers held deep convictions of faith, hope, and charity. Our families, parishes and religious communities have only to recall their history in order to discover traces of the Living God. This is truly a sacred history which must not be forgotten or belittled.

THE EUDISTS IN ACADIA

I was only 16 in 1955, and a student in Québec City. Still, I welcomed with pleasure Cardinal Paul-Émile Léger’s flight of oratory at the commemoration of the bicentennial of the Acadian deportation: “The Eudists saved Acadia!” However, they were not the only ones to have contributed to the people’s survival. Other congregations also took part, notably the Holy Cross Fathers, the Daughters of Mary of the Assumption, the Religious of Notre-Dame-du-Sacré-Cœur, etc. With courage, ingenuity, and tenacity, parents, teachers, pastors, social and political leaders constantly supported the survival of the Acadian nation. To the Eudists, Acadia was a pre-eminent area for ministry. It was there that the first Eudists in America opened, at Baie Ste-Marie (St. Mary’s Bay) in Nova Scotia, the first francophone college in that province, what was to later become

Université Sainte-Anne. In 1895, Holy Heart Seminary was founded in Halifax, and for seventy-five years it was dedicated to the training of future priests for the Maritimes. In 1898, the Collège de Caraquet was founded; after fire burned the school to the ground, it was relocated and rebuilt at Bathurst. It would later become the Université du Sacré-Cœur. In 1946 was founded the Collège d'Edmundston, later to become the Université Saint-Louis. In the 25 years of its existence, over 115 Eudists were involved with that institution; today it has become one of the campuses of the Université de Moncton. Several parishes were pastored by Eudists, mainly in the dioceses of Bathurst, Antigonish, and Yarmouth. The Eudists more or less followed in the wake of the Acadian people, following them from Acadia to Québec and even Louisiana. They gave remarkable leaders to Church and society, priests and bishops, and several leaders of Acadian communities.

THE CALL OF AUGUST 15

To celebrate the 400 years of Acadia on this feast of the Assumption is not only to turn back to look at the past to discern what unfolded through the trials, failures and storms: it is first of all facing the future with confidence and hope. Saint Paul declares that hope will not leave us disappointed, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Rm. 5:4-5). At the consecration of Edmundston's first bishop, August 15, 1945, the apostolic delegate Archbishop Hildebrando Antoniutti spoke these ringing words: "Your ancestors built this land with tears and suffering, but always under the protection of the Virgin, the luminous and brilliant star of their lives. Mary guided them, she supported, encouraged, and strengthened them along their long pilgrimage on earth. A people so devoted to Mary finds its way to progress and true glory." With eyes fixed on Mary, Star of the Sea, may we believe even more in the future of the Acadian nation which will discern the most appropriate ways to remain faithful to its roots and its mission. May Mary, the cause of our joy, also be the cause of our hope, she who was raised to heaven. May she be with the Church and protect it with her maternal love in its progress towards its everlasting home, until the day of the glorious coming of the Lord. It is in all simplicity that I dedicate the 2004-2005 pastoral year and all the new pastoral mandates which take effect today. *"Monstra te esse matrem: Sumat per te preces, Qui pro nobis natus, Tullit esse tuus."* "Show us that you are a mother: may he who willed to be your Son for us, receive our prayers from your hands."

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