
THE DIOCESE OF EDMUNDSTON TURNS SIXTY (2)



If we give greater importance to “diamond jubilees” than to “golden jubilees”, in marriage, the priestly and the religious life, it can happen that, even if we love to celebrate civil and parish anniversaries, we usually pay more attention to the fiftieth and one hundredth anniversaries than to a sixtieth and an eightieth anniversary. This happened to be the case in 1994-1995 when we celebrated in grand style the fiftieth anniversary of our diocese with terrific activities in each of the five pastoral zones or deaneries. These celebrations were even telecast by Radio-Canada, in 1995! On the occasion of the diocese’s sixtieth anniversary, I invite you to raise your voices in praise to the Lord, and to offer him the years to come. May my thoughts on the topic be a source of hope for the future.

WORLD OF THE LITTLE ONES

On November 18 I had the joy of meeting the writer Olivier Le Gendre, at the Anne Sigier publishing house. Olivier is a father, he has held a staff position in informatics with a business counselling firm. He has already published seven books of spirituality, six of them with Anne Sigier. In his last book, *Les Évangiles des parents* [“The Parents’ Gospels”], the author states his firm conviction that the Gospel has something very specific to say to parents. The Gospel is with them in their joys and sorrows and concerns, giving to these latter a surprising dimension. This wager is an act of faith: the words of the Son of God can transform the way we see our children and our inner lives. The Gospel changes the way we look at ourselves and our children. It sets us in our proper place. In the Gospel as in education, priority is given to the little one and authority is there as a service: forgiveness has precedence over alleged justice. The concordance between the values of education and those of the Gospel places us within a luminous mystery: our role as parents is an evangelical role which gives us a refreshing dignity. *Les Évangiles des parents*: a book worth meditating!

A LETTER TO THE SUCCESSORS OF JOHN PAUL II

It was Olivier Le Gendre, a lay person, who fearlessly took the initiative, without taking himself for another, of writing to the Pope’s next two successors who will have to take up papal service in the next twenty-five years. Le Gendre and I talked about it together: John Paul II’s succession will not be the business of only one or two persons, but it is together as a Church that we shall have to pick up new challenges. I believe that the voice of Olivier Le Gendre will be similar to that of Saint Catherine of Sienna who, in the fourteenth century, influenced Pope Gregory XI to leave Avignon and return to Rome. I want to share with you what Olivier talked about, in referring to the Church’s future; I believe that several of his remarks can apply to our own Church’s future. At the beginning of the millennium, following a long crisis during which it lost a good part of its political, cultural, and moral influence, the Catholic Church is undertaking a very important stage of its journey. The numerical decrease of the Church in Western countries and the lessening of its influence and credibility in the world will force it to reconsider a model of functioning and governance which was its glory and strength, but which has now become ineffective.

FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE

For good or ill, the Catholic Church has recognised that it can no longer ally faith with power, coercion, and conquest. It can only propose the faith. It promotes freedom of conscience, the freedom which comes from God and which forbids all coercion in the name of faith. Even as it regrets and declares non-Christian certain behaviours, it can no longer and wants no longer to use force on people, to obey the commandments. The Church is no longer a power in the sense of political institutions or those organisations that mix politics with culture and religion. The Church people of God thrives on its faith and the witness of that faith in Christ Jesus. This is its foundation, this is its mission.

THE CHURCH NEEDS...

Due to much misunderstanding, clumsiness, and even errors, too many people have distanced themselves from the Church that could have offered them much, and which they could have helped develop. The Church more than ever needs the intelligence, heart, and energy of all its members. It is impoverished in counting on the sole strength of its leaders. The Church also needs that those who have left because of their disappointment take a second look at it with a renewed vision and render the service of giving the reasons for their having left the Church. The Church needs the non believers to tell it the reason for their refusal of the faith. The Church has the means to renew the power of attraction which it had for so long, even if, for this, it has to accept new ways of presenting itself to the world, and new modes of operation.

AN EXCHANGE OF LOVE

The Church exists because Peter loved, and loved much. The Church exists because others after him loved the Church, and loved it much. The Church exists, and its members walk the path of holiness because they have decided to love more, more than it can be normal in a century that can be bright or dark, tepid or disenchanted. The Church of Edmundston exists because there are baptised and confirmed people who exist and who love much. It is on that one condition that we can glimpse bright tomorrows for our jubilant Church. As our beloved Saint Theresa of the Child Jesus would say: "If love were to lack in the Church, it could no longer continue to exist. I understood that if love were to die out, the Apostles would no longer proclaim the Gospel, and the martyrs would refuse to shed their blood... I understood that love included every vocation, that love was everything, that it enveloped all times and all places... In other words, that it is eternal! Then, in an excess of my delirious joy, I cried out: 'O Jesus my Love... I have finally discovered my vocation, and it is love!'" May love ever guide our steps, in the years to come!

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