
A HAPPY AND HOLY NEW YEAR 2005!



In extending to you my best wishes for peace, joy, and health in 2005, I want to urge you to welcome every day of the new year with faith and gratitude. I give thanks with you for the year passed, and confidently offer the year 2005.

YEAR OF EXEMPLARY GENEROSITY

Looking back on what has gone on in the Diocese of Edmundston, in the last year, how can we not be filled with thanksgiving for everything beautiful and holy that has taken place among us? How could we fail to recognise what the pastors, pastoral teams, volunteers, and parishioners have achieved, during this period? Only the Lord who can repay one hundredfold everything that is done for him, knows all that has happened in our milieu. To all of these people I want to express, on behalf of the Church of Edmundston, my deepest gratitude and thanks. We find so much generosity and life in every area, in families, teams, committees, organisations, and associations. We must recognise that though we are not many, vitality and responsibility have never waned, through the days and weeks of the past year. Diocesan and parish life are like family life: everyone brings his or her own share into it.

A YEAR OF THANKSGIVING

On October 17 Pope John Paul II opened the Year of the Eucharist, to continue until October 29, 2005. We often use the word "Eucharist", but we probably forget that its first meaning is "giving thanks" or "thanksgiving". Through the Memorial of his death, resurrection, and return in glory, Jesus is in a constant state of thanksgiving to his Father. He does not cease thanking his Father on behalf of us all. We can respond to the pressing invitation of Saint Thomas Aquinas, one of the theologians of the great sacrament: "Sing hymns and praises to your chief and shepherd. You must do so, as long as you can because he is beyond all praises, and you can never praise him enough. The Living Bread, the Bread of Life, is offered to our praises. At the sacred meal of the Last Supper, he was really given to the Twelve. Let us praise him with strong and full voice, may the joy of our hearts be glorious and strong. O Good Shepherd, our true Bread, nourish us and protect us. You who know everything and can do everything, you who feed us on earth, lead us to the banquet of heaven, in the company of your saints." In these final days of 2004 and at the dawn of 2005, is it not true that our entire being can become "thanksgiving"? Filled with the goodness of the Lord, we proclaim to the world: *His love is from age to age!*

FINANCIAL CAMPAIGN AND MORE!

Allow me to return to an particular event: The year 2004 will have been marked by the extraordinary generosity of a never before held major diocesan financial campaign. No one could have anticipated that the gifts and pledges would reach not only the 3.6 million dollars hoped-for, but total 4.1 million dollars! While setting up new pastoral projects in catechetics/religious education, and in youth and family ministry, we also had to ensure that we would have the financial means to guarantee their existence in the years to come. Throughout 2003 and 2004, we succeeded in handling this double challenge. The majority of parishes even surpassed their respective goals. All of the Southern Victoria parishes achieved more than their goals, as did some of the Restigouche, Grand Falls, Edmundston, and Upper Madawaska parishes. With you I repeat the hymn of gratitude: "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good!" Thank you, thank you millions of times to the diocesan financial campaign board of directors, the committee of honour, the parish committees, the volunteers, and the generous benefactors. Let us continue to build together this Church we love so well! Let us sow love, let us sow life! The future is ours today!

2004 PASTORAL VISITATION

I also have fond memories of everything I experienced in my pastoral visitations from January 3 to April 4, 2004, on the occasion of my ten years as bishop. I wanted this visit to be as simple as possible, and that it take place on the occasion of Sunday Mass. I was able to meet only twenty percent of the population, but I believe that it was important for me and for them to celebrate together the great mystery of our faith. I was able to pick up several expectations from our brothers and sisters. However, what I remember the most, of this intensive pastoral visitation, is the people's deep desire to grow in faith, hope, and charity, and to pick up together the new challenges of Evangelisation 2000.

VIBRANT COMMUNITIES

I ask the people of the diocese to work more than ever at creating vibrant communities enlivened by youth, in their respective milieus. This is one of the most beautiful challenges. Take as a model the wonderful Christmas and New Year gatherings you attended: when both young and old gather together to celebrate, there is so much vitality and life! I think of the Thibodeau Family reunion to be held after Christmas: for starters there are three bowling games, followed with a meal for seventy! Everyone is looking forward to this gathering, and the young themselves would be sorely disappointed to have it cancelled. These feasts help develop solid ties with one another.

NEW YEAR'S BLESSING

My blessing to you, I take from the words of Saint Paul: "May the God of peace make you perfect in holiness. May he preserve you whole and entire, spirit, soul, and body, irreproachable at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

+ François Thibodeau

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

« From A Bishop's Journal » (573) (29 December 2004)