
THE BISHOP MUST BE A SOWER OF HOPE



In a few days I shall be celebrating my eleventh anniversary of episcopal ordination. After these eleven years of episcopal ministry in Edmundston, and following the publication of Pope John Paul II's apostolic exhortation on the mission of the bishop, I am more than ever certain that the bishop must be a sower of hope. If parents were not quickened by this divine breath, our families and societies would quickly run to their disasters. And as I look at the priests, the educators, the mothers and fathers and volunteers sowing hope all through the day, I, too, wish to be carried along by this rushing current which nothing can stop!

PROPHET OF HOPE

"The bishop is, in the midst of his Church, like a watchful sentinel, a courageous prophet, a credible witness and faithful servant of Christ, the hope of glory." In hearing such a description given by Pope John Paul II, I thank the Lord that the Holy Father is 150% the sentinel and prophet, the witness and servant. And in all humility I pray the Lord to make my actions and words concordant with such a mission; may His all-powerful grace take all of my being to make it available to this ideal of apostolic life. May all the prayers made in the Church on January 9, 1994, on my behalf, and which have not stopped since, be fully granted!

MODELS OF EPISCOPACY

Ours is a young diocese, with barely sixty years of existence. Its history nonetheless marks the men and women of our milieu. Looking at how my predecessors carried out their mission, I want to rekindle the flame of my hope. Bishop Marie-Antoine Roy, O.F.M. (1945-1948) wanted to spread the riches of Christ among the people of the all-new diocese. « *Evangelizare divitias Christi* » was his motto. He believed in the grace of Christ and never tired of reminding his brothers and sisters in the faith of it. He was the bishop who founded Collège Saint-Louis and the retreat movement. As far as Bishop Joseph-Roméo Gagnon (1949-1970) is concerned, he adopted the words of Saint Paul:

« *Mihi vivere Christus est*, » "To me, living is Christ!" He took up the same message as that of the diocese's founder. Bishop Fernand Lacroix, C.J.M. (1970-1983), had a similar theme: "Christ, everything in all things." Everything was centred on Christ, "end point of human history, the point towards which converge the desires of history and of civilisation, the centre of the human race, joy of all hearts and fullness of all desires." He contributed to the implementation in our diocese of the decrees of Vatican Council II. Bishop Gérard Dionne (1984-1993) chose for his motto "I am your brother" reminding us all of our human condition in the Church, the hopes and requirements of this great benefaction. He founded the School of Faith, promoted vocations, and held a diocesan synod. John Paul II often invites the bishops to look in faith and hope at the lives of our brother bishops, predecessors or contemporaries: we shall find there a stimulating school of holiness! Considering the various challenges they picked up with total faith in Jesus Christ, leads us to courageously and generously envisage the pastoral priorities of our respective milieus. Each episcopal period is different in social and religious situations, with its riches and limits. Never will God's grace lack to whomever places his trust in him. "My grace is sufficient to you!"

SOURCES OF INSPIRATION

If the life and ministry of my brother bishops is a source of endless inspiration, I also want to state loud and clear that the life and mission of my brother priests are a source of nourishment for my being a sower of hope. When I consider their diligence and generosity in serving the portion of the people of God given over to their care, their tireless dedication to countless committees, their desire to share the Word of God in liturgical celebrations and in catechetical meetings; when I consider the time they dedicate to prayer, all of this invites me to pray for each one of them and to ask the Lord to give them the strength of new beginnings, the power of witness, and the tenacity to hold on to the very end! I have the same feeling when I consider the tiny diocesan services team, hardly more numerous than the first Apostles! I thank the Lord for this team of faith and hope, every day I thank the Lord for their priceless collaboration. It is truly a source of hope which helps me bear my daily episcopal charge with strength and courage. When I consider all the members of my family and my congregation, when I think of the mothers and fathers of the diocese's 17,000 families, I realise how they are a stimulant to me, in my wonderful mission of hope! When I look at the children and youth in our schools, colleges, and universities, when I consider their enthusiasm, strength, creativity, and desire for progress, they strengthen my energy to faithfully carry out my mission.

A VISION OF 2005

I instantly pray the Lord to keep me faithful to him in all things, and to be faithful to the people confided to my pastoral care, that I may contribute my share to building a more hope-filled, more human, and more fraternal world. I often ponder the parables of the Lord. Through them he aimed at very lofty ideals; he wanted us to be perfect as his Father is perfect. However, the Lord also knew how to remind us of very simple things, like the Kingdom being compared to a seed in the ground or to leaven in dough. Leaven isn't anything big! And neither is a seed! But they are both full of life and promise. The Lord also reminded us about who it was that gave life, growth, and being... Jesus himself gave us the seeds of hope. His birth in Bethlehem occurred in complete deprivation, and his humble life in Nazareth was similar to that of his fellowmen. His preaching very often took place quietly in the synagogue at Nazareth, or along the road as he travelled through cities and towns.

A SIMPLE PRAYER

As I approach the anniversary of my ordination, I just want to repeat the prayer of my patron saint: "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love. Where there is despair, let me bring hope. Where there is sadness, let me bring joy." As I do this I shall proclaim that the love of God is from age to age!

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« From A Bishop's Journal » (574) (05 January 2005)