
GOOD REASONS FOR CELEBRATING



Among the many reasons we have for celebrating, I think that the basic thing to do is to become aware of what we are, so as to become even more so. The same happens to birthdays as to wedding and religious anniversaries. To celebrate one's twentieth birthday is to become aware of the wonderful gift of life and of all the energy contained in the human being. To celebrate fifty years of marriage is to become aware of the wonderful times as well as of the difficulties of married life, and to believe in the power of love inhabiting the couple. To celebrate forty years of priesthood is to become aware of the journey made, and to seize on the occasion to be more and more consonant with the image of Jesus Christ the One Priest.

MANY FACETS

I would never have imagined that my fortieth anniversary of ordination would have been marked and celebrated on such a scale as it was. From Monday of Holy Week, at the Chrism Mass where the faithful of the diocese had gathered in the Edmundston cathedral for the blessing of the holy oils, until the family get-together on July 2, when family and friends gathered in the parish church at Saint-Odilon, where I was ordained a priest by Bishop Joseph-Aurèle Plourde on May 8, 1965, so much kindness was showered on me from every quarter, with prayers and kind wishes, generosity and solidarity. I would like to bring to the Lord all those who have helped me become aware of the graces I received and of the road travelled, people who are still helping me be more and more the priest I want to be, according to the heart of God.

A PRECIOUS SYMBOL

At my priestly ordination several relatives and friends gave me a chalice. Every time I use it I pray in a special way for all those who journeyed with me through my childhood and the years of my pastoral formation. I cannot name them all because several of them, especially the woodsmen who gave anonymously, helped me study my way to the priesthood. May the Lord repay them a hundredfold for all they did for me to become a Eudist priest. My thoughts go back to Father Lucien Ouellet, the curate at Saint-Odilon, who asked me, around July 15, 1951, to take an entrance examination for the Externat Saint-Jean-Eudes, and who, the day after Mother's death on August 5, 1951, assured me that I could enter the school, and that he would look after my tuition. Now aged 82, Father Ouellet is still in active ministry with the Québec Provincial Police. His wonderful zeal and enthusiasm are a sign to me for a fruitful ministry for a few more wonderful years. I am also thinking of Mademoiselle Simonne, of Caraquet, a school teacher who died last year, who supported me in major seminary and who, throughout her long life, carried me in her daily prayers. May the symbol of the chalice always remind me of all these generous people, both from my immediate family and elsewhere.

A SECOND SYMBOL

To remind me of all the graces attached to my forty years as a priest, in this Year of the Eucharist decreed by Pope John Paul II, the new monstrance I will use in the Saint John Eudes Chapel at the Diocesan Centre on days of prayer and adoration, will remind me of all those who have been associated with all these celebrations. This new symbol will remind me of the journey made, but it will especially invite me to "do Eucharist" and to become more and more a "Eucharistic person," a person of prayer, one who ceaselessly recalls the New Covenant in Jesus, a person who can proclaim the goodness and kindness of our God.

MANY MESSAGES

Over the months the messages have kept coming in. I shall mention only a few of them. In these messages I could sense all the kindness and the charity. Like Bishop Dionne who thought that I had already written his

funeral homily and who wanted to read it in order to see what was truth and what was charity, in it, I have felt much communion and hope. Joining me in thanksgiving, Pope Benedict XVI prays that God will bring to fruition all the good I could do in taking up my share in the Church's mission, in answer to the Lord's call. The Holy Father prays that I continue in my priestly and episcopal life in the peace and happiness of a servant working in the demanding field of evangelisation with Christ the Good Shepherd as his only support, the Good Shepherd who came that we may have life to the full; the Pope also cordially sends his apostolic blessing to me and to all those taking part in the celebrations. The Superior General of the Eudist Fathers notes that forty years in the service of Christ and his Church, is something worth celebrating. Forty years of work so that the name of Jesus be better known and recognised in truth and freedom, in justice, peace, and love. The Provincial Superior, too, sends his congratulations for my commitment in the Congregation and in the Church. Praying the Lord to bless me abundantly, the Governor General of Canada is convinced that the services rendered these forty years have sustained the communities of the diocese. The Prime Minister of Canada notes the work done, which is worthy of respect and admiration. The same also from the Lieutenant Governor of New Brunswick who prays God to keep me in His love. The Prime Minister of New Brunswick extends his thanks for my contribution to the spiritual and community life in the Diocese of Edmundston and the Province: "No doubt that your experience, your spiritual counsel, your wisdom and your devotedness in community affairs have been profitable to the diocese and to the residents of Edmundston and the region."

INFINITE GRATITUDE

I thank you wholeheartedly for all your kindness and prayers. I am proud of being a priest for forty years, and I pray to welcome more and more the many graces accompanying this gift. I also ask the Lord to continue sending Gospel workers to His people, so that together we may build our beloved Church.

+ François Thibodeau ym

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

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