



From A Bishop's Journal (626)

Already Twelve Years with You!

On Monday, January 9, it will be twelve years that I was ordained bishop by Bishop Gérard Dionne: So much road has been travelled, since! I have lived so many moments of grace with you, and I want to express my deepest gratitude. I ask forgiveness to all those I may have hurt. I count on your constant prayer, that I may fulfill my mission to you to the very end. Since in a few months (May 22-31, 2006) the bishops of the Atlantic region shall be in Rome for their *ad limina* visit, I would like to reflect with you on the notion of “communion” which every bishop must have with the Holy Father, but also with his brother bishops and all the people of God.

The Choice of a Pope

Whatever the mode of election in the Latin Church, every bishop is appointed by the Holy Father after the Congregation for Bishops has studied in depth each of the candidates submitted by the Apostolic Nuncio of a given country. This is the Congregation which “elects” the bishops and transmits the name to the Holy Father. The Holy Father accepts or refuses the recommendation made to him. It is for this reason that the Apostolic Nuncio to Canada, Archbishop Carlo Curis, simply told me, when he greeted me at his Ottawa residence on October 13, 1993: “The Holy Father appoints you bishop of Edmundston in New Brunswick: Do you accept?” When I think of this scene in Ottawa, I am reminded of the annunciation made to Mary, the young girl from Nazareth... She was overwhelmed and she wondered how this was to be... I can honestly say that I, too, was overwhelmed, and several questions came to mind. “Nothing is impossible with God,” the angel had answered. To the answers given by the Nuncio, I could only say “yes” to the mission given to me by Pope John Paul II on behalf of the Church.

College of Bishops

Officially appointed fifth bishop of Edmundston on October 20, 1993, on November 4 I joined the other bishops of the Atlantic in their *ad limina* visit to Rome, that is, to the “threshold” of the basilicas of St. Peter and St. Paul, giants of the faith. The communion that was immediately established with my fellow bishops of the Atlantic and those of the Roman congregations gave me a foretaste of what I would become through episcopal ordination: a member of the college of bishops, bearing with the Holy Father and my brothers concern for all the Churches. During these Roman visits I could feel the burden carried by each Congregation, whether in the area of justice, evangelisation, unity, liturgy, consecrated life, or the doctrine of the faith. It was at that time that I first met the future Pope Benedict XVI. Pope John Paul II welcomed me as a new bishop-elect not

only at the private audience but also to his chapel and dinner table. I could write pages to describe these grace-filled moments. Thirty-four bishops from the Atlantic region, from Québec and the United States told me of their desire to take part in my ordination, but because of the bad weather, only fourteen bishops were able to make it. There was so much joy for me to be in the presence of Bishop Gérard Dionne who presided the ordination, assisted by Bishop Fernand Lacroix, C.J.M., and Archbishop Donat Chiasson of Moncton. It was also a great joy to receive from them and the other eleven bishops present the laying-on of hands.

Bishop and Presbyterium

Despite the snow storm, many priests came to the ordination. Through the mission given to me, I have to dedicate “the best of my love and concern” to the bishops and candidates to the sacred ministries. At the very beginning of my address, I dared declare: “Priests, deacons and seminarians of the Church of Edmundston, how I want to be intimately united to you! Let us never doubt that the Lord loves us infinitely. He asks us to be pastors after his own heart, and to proclaim through our lives that the love of God is alive and well. We must be faithful to prayer and to the service of the Word.” In the months following, I was very happy to experience at Sainte-Anne-de-la-Pocatière three days of fraternal sharing and prayer. A few weeks later, it was wonderful to witness the faith of my fellow priests who accepted appointments I had made: such availability and generosity on their part. During my twelve years as bishop I had the joy of ordaining five new priests, and the sorrow of presiding the funeral of eighteen diocesan priests and two Eudist confreres.

Bishop and People of God

Whether we are bishops or priests, we have a common mission: to serve the people of God of the Edmundston Church. As soon as I arrived I hastened to get to know the people of God as a whole, religious and lay. Despite the winter season, I visited each of the communities throughout the five pastoral zones, beginning with those furthest away from the episcopal city. During the years that followed I made the pastoral visitation of each of them, and published for all of us a pastoral note on them. It was a great grace to celebrate the five eucharistic congresses in preparation for the year 2000. What a privilege it was for me to meet in this way the liturgy committees, the economic affairs and religious education committees, and members of different associations of each zone. If each pastoral visitation brings its share of special graces to the faithful, it is a source of joy to the bishop himself. The shepherd must know his sheep, and the sheep must know their shepherd. In the course of all these meetings, my attachment to each community grew: being unable to physically be with each person in the diocese, I carried and still carry them in my daily prayer.

The Body of Christ

The bishop’s chief mission is to contribute to building the Body of Christ which is the Church. It is with infinitely great respect that each gesture, each word, each page written must be done. Without the Holy Spirit who is constantly with the people of God and who is always with us, it would be impossible to adequately fulfill the ministry asked of us.

+ François Thibodeau

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