



From A Bishop's Journal

The Treasure that Our Families Are

Last year I had the privilege of talking twice about the Thibodeau family, the first being on the occasion of the three hundredth anniversary of the death of our ancestor Pierre Thibodeau, and the second being on the occasion of my father's one hundredth birthday. Each time, I mentioned the "treasure of our families." Just a few days following our family gatherings for Christmas and the New Year, we have once again experienced this richness. In former days priests and future priests were asked to exercise extreme discretion regarding their families, following the example of the high priest Melchizedek about whose genealogy nothing is known. I so firmly believe in the unique role played by my family in preparing me for the priesthood, and their influence in my priestly and episcopal life, that I have no hesitation in talking about it – a lot! – despite the scriptural injunction.

"Son of a Bold People"

I came very close to giving these pages the title "March, the Thibodeau Month," with the subtitle, "The Treasure that Our Families Are," but the subtitle prevailed. It is not usual for a family to have its own national holiday, and especially not a complete month dedicated to it! This is something to be proud of. However, I learned that there was a big distinction to be made between pride and boastfulness. They are two very different feelings! A few days after my episcopal ordination, I quickly learned why the month of March was dedicated to the Thibodeaus: "Fresh and windy!" I was quickly told. This is a good lesson in humility; however, humility is not an easy virtue. Just imagine: when I went on the internet and put in a search for "Thibodeau," I came up with 290,000 references! There are an estimated 16,000 Thibodeaus in North America, belonging to every social class, trade, rich and poor, most of them being people of modest means, good workers, and sociable. I remember that on my first visit to Québec at the age of 12, I came across the name "Thibodeau" on a building in Québec's Lower Town, near the church of Our Lady of Victories: I was quite amazed by this discovery. I was told that some of them had experienced prosperity, while others lived in poverty. My father was one of the latter. I well remember my father earning 55 cents an hour, in 1951, working for the highway department, and there were 12 of us at home. One needed a treasury of solidarity, in order to face life. If my reading of writer Serge Patrice Thibodeau is correct, the word "Thibodeau" would be of Celtic origin, the "-eau" in Thibod-eau meaning son of or child of, like in Irish "O" surnames. "Thibaud" would mean "a bold people," and "Thibodeau" would mean "son of a bold people." This is something to be proud of! But it could very well be that several

Thibodeaus are “braggarts”! A few weeks after my episcopal consecration I got a phone call from a Father Thibodeau that I didn’t know. He identified himself as Father Thibodeau, and then he told me that Pope John Paul II had decided to appoint a Thibodeau bishop, and he added: “It was either you or me, but it is you who was appointed!” At the Thibodeau World Convention at Dieppe, in 1994, the story was repeated before this Father Thibodeau who happened to be present, and he would have liked to see himself six feet under! You see, there are human treasures in our families, treasures of history, treasures of pride, treasures of teasing one another, treasures of unsurpassed life stories. And it is important to preserve these beautiful snapshots of life: they are full of life, humour, and fantasy!

Patriarch Pierre

Sociologists tell us that today families are more mononuclear than before, when they formed part of a wider family network. At Pierre Thibodeau’s, the patriarch of the family and the first to come to Acadia in 1654, there were more than twenty inhabitants in the house! Pierre came to Acadia in 1654, and married Marie Thériot. Together they had nineteen children: imagine all the descendants! “Intergenerational” was more than an abstraction, then, it was lived on a daily basis. This is the Thibodeau family, but we could say as much about the great families of the Madawaska: the Couturiers, the Thériaults, the Pelletiers, the Dubés, the Sirois, the Martins, etc. That’s a lot of people, with a lot of solidarity, and a lot of life and priceless, treasures. We are rightly proud that in our milieu there are many people interested in genealogy. It is fantastic to see the number of monographs and collections of genealogies. If you surf the internet, you find there an excellent aid for your unfinished or incomplete genealogies. Nevertheless, better than books and even better than the internet, our family reunions are the places of choice to tell us of the past, to discover the present, and discern the future. Humans have always tried to trace their origins, they have always wanted to know more about their past, and it is good that it is like that. We need a past, a history; we need our roots, we need ancestors.

Living Examples

The Bible does not hesitate to use genealogies. At the very beginning of the Bible, the book of Genesis gives us the genealogy of Noah’s sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. The Gospels of Matthew and Luke both give us genealogies of Jesus, one of them to confirm that Jesus, descendant of David, is the expected Messiah, and the other, to assure the non-Jews that Jesus, son of Adam, belongs to the human race. The Letter to the Hebrews has indications on the origins of Jesus. After reminding us that God, in ancient days spoke through the prophets to the fathers, in these days which are the last, has spoken through the Son whom He has established the heir of all things, and through whom He made the ages. The author of the Letter describes Jesus as “splendour of God’s glory and image of his substance;” this Son supports the universe through his powerful word. Wanting to lead a great number of children to glory, it was fitting the He for whom and by whom all things exist, made perfect through his sufferings the one who was to guide them to salvation, because both sanctifier and sanctified share the same origin. This is why Jesus has no shame in calling them brothers: Jesus is of our race and we are of Jesus’ race. In Jesus’ genealogy we find the names of the great patriarchs, but we also discover very plain people who would never have thought of being a “link”

through whom Jesus the Christ would be born. Examples are Booz and Ruth. How proud they must be to have marked the path for Jesus! And in these genealogies as in ours, there are great saints and great sinners. We all belong to the same race, and we are all children of God, promised to the same resurrection. This is cause of our pride, our glory. Telling the truth is not boasting, even if it is impressive to call ourselves “children of God” and to be truly so.

+ François Thibodeau *in*

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

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