



From A Bishop's Journal (634)

2006: A Special Lent

With Lent beginning today, I want to wish you all a very beneficial period in every aspect of your life. For a long time we have stressed the aspects of conversion, fasting, and penance; if we stress the aspect of sharing with our neediest brothers and sisters, – without leaving aside the essential aspects – this wonderful time should be dedicated to spiritual renewal, and to better deepen our faith, hope and charity. For the fourth consecutive year, I shall try in the weeks to come, to fathom more deeply the wonderful friendship left by our Saviour. During Lent 2005, it was Level III of the catechetics programme that helped me discover God's gifts. This year, by deepening the contents of Level IV, we shall discover even more this Jesus who shows us that he shall be with us always.

Getting Acquainted

When we arrive somewhere we try to get acquainted with at least a few individuals to guide us and introduce us to others. I remember that in the winter of 1994, immediately following my episcopal ordination, I visited every parish in the diocese in order to get acquainted with the people who had been confided to my care, in this new mission of mine. From 1996 to 2000 I reserved all of the five Lenten periods for more in-depth pastoral visitations which produced so many good fruits. On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of my episcopal ordination, I once again visited each of the 32 parishes of the diocese of Edmundston: it is critical that the shepherd know his people and the people know him.

Who Is He?

The same is true of every milieu despite the anonymity which seems to prevail just about everywhere. Still, it is important for us to know who we are dealing with, and who is our neighbour. We are lucky in the diocese of Edmundston that it is a small diocese of human dimensions, far distant from the inhuman megalopolis. Our area is conducive to developing new acquaintances and even friendships. I know people who are so keen on meeting newcomers in their milieu that they ask two or three questions in one sentence, like: "How old do you call yourself?" so eager are they to know as much as possible about their new acquaintance. This happens more discretely, in school and

at work: through the weeks and months we get to better know and appreciate one another. I remember very clearly our first classes in social work with our professor of psychology who had looked long and hard at us before solemnly declaring, "I don't love you!" The entire class was astounded: imagine a teacher who does not love his students from the very first! He repeated his statement: "I don't love you and it may be that the feeling is mutual!" We said to ourselves: "With that face of his and with the speech he holds, it's really true!" And the psychologist continued: "We cannot love each other, since we don't know one another." I must confess that our first reaction rapidly changed in the weeks following; these moments of provocation helped us enter into a deeper relationship with our new professor.

Survey in the Year 30

If this Lenten season allowed us to get better acquainted with Jesus Christ, it would be one of the best Lents we would have had. If this special time helped us get to know Jesus better, our Easter day would then be totally different. In chapter 16 of his gospel, the evangelist Matthew reports an interesting "survey" made by Jesus in the region of Caesaria Philippi. He asked his disciples: "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" They replied: "Some say John the Baptizer, others Elijah, still others Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. And you," he said to them, "who do you say that I am?" "You are the Messiah," Simon Peter answered. Jesus replied, "Blest are you, Simon, son of Jonah! No mere man has revealed this to you, but my heavenly Father. I for my part declare to you, you are 'Rock'" and on this rock I will build my church, and the jaws of death shall not prevail against it. I will entrust to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you declare bound on earth shall be bound in heaven; whatever you declare loosed on earth shall be loosed in heaven..." From then on Jesus the Messiah started to indicate to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer greatly there at the hands of the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and to be put to death, and raised up on the third day.

An Uncommon Surprise

Simon Peter just couldn't get over these revelations. He was dumbfounded! He took Jesus aside to remonstrate with him. "May you be spared, Master! God forbid that any such thing ever happen to you!" Jesus turned on Peter and said, "Get out of my sight, you satan! You are trying to make me trip and fall. You are not judging by God's standards but by man's." How wonderful and beneficial it would be if the 2006 Lenten period introduced us further still into God's thoughts! The gospel for Ash Wednesday invites us to more and more discover God our Father who sees in the secret. "When you pray, go to your private room and, when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in that secret place, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you... When you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that no one will know you are fasting except your Father who sees all that is done in secret; and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you."

Time of Gratitude

Jesus, who came to show us that God is our Father, will make us enter into the Father's intimacy. And I am certain that the Father will help us get to better know His beloved Son, the one He sent us. He shall have us experience a re-birth in him. It shall be pleasant for us to know Jesus better in order to better discover our Father's kindness and mercy.

Have a good Lent!

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