



From A Bishop's Journal (644)

Joys and Sorrows in the Beloved Edmundston Diocesan Church (1)

Before talking about the joys and sorrows encountered in our beloved Church, I want to tell you how the March Pastoral Orientation Congress for a New Evangelisation was a source of exceeding joy: its success, the enthusiasm and the warmth felt, and the vision it unfolded will remind me for years to come – at least until my retirement – that our Church is very much alive and that it knows how to face challenges.

Disciples of Christ

With God's grace I would like to share with you some excerpts from the quinquennial report I sent to the Holy See in preparation of my *ad limina* visit, this month, on the state of our diocese, these past five years. This report is an 80-page document, besides the appendices and other annexed documents. In the conciliar document *The Church in the Modern World*, we read that "The joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted, are the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community of people united in Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit in their pilgrimage towards the Father's kingdom, bearers of a message of salvation for all of humanity. That is why they cherish a feeling of deep solidarity with the human race and its history."

1. The Poor

First of all my attention is drawn to the poor in our milieu. One of the indicators of this poverty is the number of people frequenting our food banks, and the distribution of social welfare cheques. The Social Justice Forum regularly publishes sobering statistics on this question. The number of poor in Canada continues to climb, and this has repercussions in our milieu. The situation of thousands of children and women is far from improving. Nearly 200 meals are served each day at the Rado shelter [in Edmundston]. Many jobs have been lost through the closing of businesses and companies in our milieu. Many jobs are insecure. Seasonal work does not benefit everybody. The employment insurance reform is a long time coming. The increase in the cost of living, especially in heating oil and other fuels, widens the chasm between rich and poor. We may be alarmed by this collective impoverishment, but we must nonetheless thank those who work for the welfare of our population. When we talk about sorrows in our Church, we must first think of the financially poor. Pope

Benedict XVI's first encyclical letter reminds us of three major, intimately connected components of the Church's activity: the proclamation of the Word, the celebration of the sacraments, and the ministry of charity which incites us to love our neighbour as God loves and helps His children.

2. The Suffering

Secondly, when there is question of sorrows, we must think of all those who are suffering from illness, from the death of loved ones, and other trials and disasters. We are lucky to have in our milieu four medical establishments: Edmundston, Grand Falls, Saint-Quentin, and Perth-Andover. We may have to wait for a while before having an appointment with a specialist, but we have not experienced the filled-to-capacity emergency departments which other milieus encounter. We can be justly proud of the services available, the high professionalism, and the many volunteers at the hospital and at home. A few years ago, a new senior citizens' home was opened in Saint Leonard to care for the elderly and those suffering from Alzheimer's disease. I believe that in all our parishes people are vigilant regarding the situation of the elderly and those who are mourning a death, especially those families that have lost a loved one through suicide. When I think of all the suicides in our milieu, there is really cause for being sad: What was it that took away all hope of life, for these people we saw every day?

3. The Abused

Thirdly, when we talk about sorrow in our Church, I think of all those who are victims of violence and abuse, in our milieu. There are no public statistics available on cases of violence and incest in our country. Through looking at homes for battered women or through the recent publication of books on the question, however, we are alerted to the issue so that we may be in a position to prevent such acts of violence. Our diocesan advisory committee on sexual abuse – a committee that exists in every Canadian diocese – has just produced a code of ethics for the prevention of all physical, psychological or sexual abuse by people of authority in the Church, whether in the area of catechetics or in youth ministry. One victim would already be one too many!

4. Population Decrease

Talking of sorrows, I would suggest that a marked decrease in our population in our area is one of them. According to the last census, there has been a 4% decrease of population in New Brunswick. In our area we can no longer speak of a Catholic population of 55,000, as we could ten years ago. The Catholic population now stands at 49,628, and this has repercussions in all areas. The number of baptisms and funerals is practically equal, with 530 baptisms and 520 funerals last year, while fifteen years ago we had 775 baptisms and 406 deaths.

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