



From A Bishop's Journal (646)

Joys and Sorrows in the Beloved Edmundston Diocesan Church (2)

I want to continue sharing with you a few pages of my quinquennial report to the Holy See, in which I described the state of our diocese over the last five years.

5. Disappearance of Traditional Values

Among the sorrows to be counted is the disappearance of certain family, social, and community values. In the last thirty years it seems that particular legislation and Supreme Court judgements have been undermining our traditional values. And we have even heard during the last election campaign certain politicians comment on abortion, assisted suicide, euthanasia, same-sex marriage, as traditional Canadian values, as compassionate values inscribed in the charter of rights and freedoms.

6. The Treatment of the Church

A sixth sorrow I want to name is the way our Church is being treated, especially by certain media: the Church's conservatism is denounced, especially in matters of sexual morality, regarding women's ordination, priestly celibacy, birth control, life and respect of life. During the last two plenary meetings of the Canadian Bishops' Conference, in Cornwall, Ontario, the Church was hounded about the sexual abuse scandals caused by some priests: lines of picketers lasted all week, and the picketers were even at our celebrations. Even at the election of our new Pope, unimaginable criticism was raised here and in other countries, to the extent that France apologised to Benedict XVI. Wherever the Church is targeted anywhere on earth, our very own local Church is also affected. When the Church is attacked or denounced, it is also our Church that is attacked or denounced.

7. 20% Attendance at Sunday Celebrations

A seventh cause of sorrow in our Church is that approximately 80% of the Catholic population no longer regularly participate in Sunday celebrations. The feeling of being part of a local parish has disappeared. If possible we would have to maintain all of the equipment, services, and resources as before, however difficult the burden. As a matter of fact, there are fewer than 15,000 people in our diocese taking part in the 50 Sunday masses. On weekends, several churches are nearly empty of worshippers.

8. Dechristianisation and Religious Ignorance

Here I want to point out not only the abandonment of the Sunday practice but also a certain form of dechristianisation and religious ignorance. My predecessor, Bishop Gerard Dionne, had judged that the short Sunday homilies were not enough to help increase the faith of the baptised. To foster the renewal of their faith, he established the School of Faith in both the French and English sectors. The School of Faith continues today [in the French sector] under the direction of Sister Jacqueline Poirier, f.m.a., but with a smaller attendance, nowhere like the 200 or so who used to come. Without permanent faith education, it comes as no surprise that when faced with the smallest controversy regarding the Church or the Gospel, we quickly gobble up the sensational – as with *The Da Vinci Code* – and even the worst errors broadcast, like the gnostic movements. Several people have never read the Bible, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, or even a serious Christian book.

9. The Disappearance of Religious Movements

A ninth sorrow in our Church is the nearly systematic disappearance of all religious movements like the Catholic action movements, youth movements like scouting, and support movements for spouses like La Rencontre and the SOF [“Service d’orientation des foyers” – both French movements]. I also think about how difficult it is for associations to recruit: this is the case with the Knights of Columbus, the Daughters of Isabella, and the Catholic Women’s League.

10. The Decrease in Vocations

Finally, a tenth sorrow and not the least is the decrease in the number of priests, religious, missionaries, and even married people in our milieu, and there is no indication of forthcoming change in any of these four groups. In the last twenty-five years, thirty-five priests have died and six new priests have been ordained. We have only one seminarian. In the last ten years the number of religious sisters has gone from 150 to 100; there are no new novices, in the diocese. The actual number of our missionaries 24: a few years ago we had over 60. Last year there were 123 weddings in the entire diocese, while in 1991 there were 281. Regarding the number of separated and divorced we could say that the ratio is 50-50, with happy couples who want to pursue their Christian mission.

Challenges to Pick Up

I am usually not in the habit of rehashing our problems and difficulties, our concerns and sorrows. I would rather see them as challenges to be picked up. I would rather focus on what is going well rather than waste my time mourning situations I can’t immediately remedy. I prefer focussing on what is going well, and that is why I want to tell you, in the following Journal entries, about the fifteen principal joys, in the Diocese of Edmundston.

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