



From A Bishop's Journal (650)

The Baptismal Call (1)

This is my thirteenth Pentecost pastoral letter to you. Today, I would like to reflect with you on the wonderful calling which resounded in us on the day of our baptism and which is part of God's kindnesses for humankind. Our story – like that of all the people of God – is a sacred history, and it is good for us to our own lives today within this great ocean of God's love. His love is truly from age to age! Let us first remember the Pentecost Event. Fifty days after their exodus from Egypt, God made a covenant with His new people at Sinai. Fifty days after Jesus' resurrection, the Spirit manifests Himself in Jerusalem in a very special way.

The Wonders of God

In the Acts of the Apostles Saint Luke the Evangelist describes with scrupulous care the Pentecost Event. We should read over again this narrative which tells us of the wonders that took place that day and still continue today. "Each of us hears them speaking in his own tongue about the wonders God has accomplished," the thousands of people present at the event exclaimed. Following Peter's discourse outlining in broad strokes the history of salvation, the people's hearts were touched and they asked the Apostles: "What are we to do, brothers?" And Peter answered: "You must reform and be baptised each one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, that your sins may be forgiven; then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is for you and your children that the promise was made, and to all those still far off whom the Lord our God calls." Upon hearing these words, they asked to be baptised, and that day about three thousand joined the fledgling community.

Outline of this Pastoral Letter

I would first like to recall the moments that followed the Edmundston Diocesan Synod (1987-1990). With the desire to better explain "A Heritage to Discover and Share," in September, 1992 this priority was adopted, and as a consequence of this there were "great missions" in several parishes, missions focussed on a discovery of baptism. Secondly, I shall let three people who are remarkable for their theological and pastoral experience to give us a summary of those elements they consider "major," in talking about baptism. Thirdly, I invited some in the diocese to give a short testimony about their own baptism. Finally, I shall give a few pastoral guidelines and directives for our diocesan Church. May this Letter help us better grasp the wonderful work of Christ's Passover, in which we share through baptism.

A Heritage to Discover and Share

“We who have received the Gospel are given the mission of proclaiming this Good News of salvation by the witness of our lives. May our faith be active, may our charity be inventive, may our hope hold fast so that the name of Jesus the Christ be everywhere proclaimed, for the joy and salvation of the world.” These were the concluding words of the closing rite at the launching of the pastoral priority, on September 13, 1992. Several weeks later, on November 1, 1992, the parish evangelisation missions began. I had the privilege of taking part in this mission, along with Eudist confreres, Marist priests, and diocesan clergy.

Distress Call

Disciples of Saint John Eudes (1601-1680), the Eudists were not ignorant of the truly “alarming” distress call sounded by their founder regarding the people’s ignorance of baptism. “It is deplorable to the point of shedding tears of blood, to observe that of the great number of people on earth who have been baptised and, consequently, have become children of God, members of Jesus Christ and living temples of the Holy Spirit, and obliged to live in conformity with these divine qualities, they are more numerous those who live as beasts, pagans, and even devils than those who live as true Christians. What is the cause of this great evil? There are many causes, but one of the main ones is that the greater number of these Christians in wrapped up in such a dense cloud and such colossal ignorance of things belonging to their profession [of Christians], that they don’t even know what it means to have been baptised. They do not know what it is to be Christian. They are hardly aware of the indescribable graces and unfathomable favours that God has given them through the sacrament of baptism. They spend their whole lives without thinking at all about the solemn promises they made to His Divine Majesty, and to the very important obligations to which they committed themselves.”

Covenant

Referring to the “covenant contract” entered upon by the Holy Trinity and the baptised, Saint John Eudes recalls God’s many covenants in favour of humankind, whether with Noah and Abraham our father in the faith, with Moses and the liberated people, or the great covenant announced by the prophets and brought to fruition by the blood of Christ. Like a good Norman Frenchman, Saint John Eudes spoke to the people of his time about something he knew well about: contracts. On the one hand he establishes God’s “promises” to every baptised person, and the baptised person’s promises to God. This trinitarian relationship is very alive. It is for this reason that throughout the six days of the great mission we studied the following themes: “Called by the Father, united to Jesus, energised by the Spirit and sent into the world.” This was a recapitulation of Eudist teaching, a teaching that is still timely, if we are to trust the many editions of the works of Saint John Eudes, both in Europe and in America; these writings which contributed to the seventeenth-century Christian renewal can help us renew our vision of baptism.

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