



From A Bishop's Journal (659)

For the September 18, 2006 Election

As usual at the beginning of an election campaign, whether municipal, provincial or federal, I send out a pastoral message to the faithful of the diocese, urging them to fulfill their obligations as citizens and Christians.

Hopes

My hope is that this electoral campaign will help us grow in democracy, that it will be an opportunity for us to better understand the socio-economic consequences of such an exercise, and that it will help us find better solutions for problems we are faced with. I also hope that all will have the chance of voting for the candidate or party they judge to be the most suited to form the government.

Prayer

I urge all the faithful of the diocese to offer a prayer, however short it may be, for the candidates in their riding and for the next government called to serve the population of New Brunswick. Let us admit it: it takes a lot of courage and determination to move into the political arena. If in ages past, in their journey through the desert the Chosen People often “recriminated” by criticising their leaders, we today still expect a lot from them. This is a healthy sign, as long as this criticism aims at a greater common good and not at one's personal, first. In this time of violence and terrorism, death threats are even sent to our politicians. When certain individuals plan on attacking the politicians' families, this makes many possible candidates hesitate. This is why I invite you to join me in daily prayer for all the candidates.

Vatican Council II

The teaching of Vatican Council II on this question is invaluable. For example, the Pastoral Constitution on *The Church in the Modern World*, says this (nos. 75 and 76): “Christians must be conscious of their specific and proper role in the political community; they should be a shining example by their sense of responsibility and dedication to the common good; they should show in practice how authority can be reconciled with freedom, personal initiative with solidarity and the needs of the social framework as a whole, and the advantages of unity with the benefits of diversity. They should recognise the legitimacy of differing points of view on the organisation of world affairs

and show respect for the individual citizens and groups who defend their opinions by legitimate means. Political parties, for their part, must support whatever in their opinion is conducive to the common good, but must never put their own interests before the common good.”

A Difficult and Noble Art

The Council continues: “So that all citizens will be able to play their part in political affairs, civil and political education is vitally necessary for the population as a whole and for young people in particular, and must be diligently attended to. Those with a talent for the difficult yet noble art of politics, or whose talents in this matter can be developed, should prepare themselves for it, and, setting aside their own convenience and material interests, they should engage in political activity. They must combat injustice and oppression, arbitrary domination and intolerance by individuals or political parties, and they must do so with integrity and wisdom. They must dedicate themselves to the welfare of all in a spirit of sincerity and fairness, of love and of the courage demanded by political life.”

Politics and the Church

Vatican II teaches that “The political community and the Church are autonomous and independent of each other in their own fields. They are both at the service of the personal and social vocation of the same individuals, though under different titles. Their service will be more efficient and beneficial to all if both institutions develop better cooperation according to the circumstances of place and time. For humanity’s horizons are not confined to the temporal order; living in human history, they retain the fullness of their eternal calling. By preaching the truths of the Gospel and clarifying all sectors of human activity through its teaching and the witness of its members, the Church respects and encourages the political freedom and responsibility of the citizens. With loyalty to the Gospel in the fulfilment of its mission in the world, the Church, whose duty it is to foster and elevate all that is true, all that is good, and all that is beautiful in the human community, consolidates peace between peoples for the glory of God.”

Many Challenges

Taking into account the political situation in New Brunswick, and its socio-economic resources, the challenges are many and at times of an insurmountable disproportion: How do we ensure a fair distribution of the Province’s riches; how do we ensure better care for the poor, the protection of victims of violence and the rejects of our communities; how do we stop the exodus of our population, especially the young, to other provinces; how do we continue to confront challenges in health and education; how do we ensure economic viability to all the regions; how do we ensure the fair distribution of services in both French and English; how do we ensure a legitimate fiscal balance...? The list could go on, in the areas of culture, sports, and human rights for both the First Nations and the Francophones/Anglophones.

Evaluation and Vision

It is therefore through evaluating everything our elected members – on the Government side and in the Opposition – have accomplished during the present mandate, that the population is asked to

decide. We must also specify the vision we want New Brunswick to have: a land where it is good to live, a land where all citizens are given equal chances, a proud and daring people, a people living in solidarity, filled with faith, and ever trusting in divine Providence.

+ François Thibodeau

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

08-23-06