



From A Bishop's Journal (693)

A Tribute to Father Armand Plourde (1934-2007)

Father Armand Plourde passed away April 10, 2007. This brought me to read over the story of his vocation which was published in my 2002 Pentecost Pastoral Letter on the priesthood. I must say that I was truly impressed by the love he had for his family, his Acadian roots, and his Church, and by the struggle he waged for twenty years against Parkinson's Disease.

The Family Unifier

Father Plourde writes: "Born in Saint-Quentin in 1934 to Joseph P. Plourde and Marie-Anne Cyr, I was baptised Armand Plourde. I was privileged to witness at home the love that Father and Mother had for each other. I am the fourteenth of a family of twenty-four children, three of whom died at an early age and seven others as adults. I was very happy, out in the country – in the rural Flemming settlement of Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes – where we lived and where Mother was born. I must admit that the family home was the anchorhold of the Plourde family. It was filled with memories and we enjoyed being together." Mrs. Plourde loved the children, those of her second husband and her own, but she was particularly attached to Father Armand: her second book (under the pen-name of Marguerite des Prés) often mentioned her concern for the health of her son, especially after learning of his serious illness.

A Gatherer of the Acadians

Everyone in the Restigouche and throughout New Brunswick know of Father Plourde's Acadian patriotism, of the battles waged with the Parti Acadien, to the point where he was nearly elected to the New Brunswick Legislative Assembly. "Committed to the Acadian cause and the defence of the French language," he writes, "words came easily, whatever the cause. I had a lot to do, but I believe that I was gifted for this and things were going well, in my pastoral work." Deeply involved in social questions, he could not remain indifferent to social and economic inequalities endured by the Francophones in his milieu.

Man of the Church

Ordained a priest June 12, 1960, Father Plourde dedicated himself heart and soul to the people of St. Leonard, Drummond, and Ste-Anne-de-Madawaska, where he served as curate. For fifteen years he was pastor of Notre-Dame-des-Prodiges parish in Kedgwick, which he served faithfully. For proof

of this we have only to read his parish bulletins called *La Gazette de Kedgwick*, where we can discern his passion for God and for justice. This small publication left no one indifferent. He had a knack for reaching people. He also served five years as pastor of St-Léonard-Parent. Wherever he was he always reminded his parishioners of their dignity as children of God.

Fighting Illness

Father Plourde was a man of remarkable physical strength and stamina, and he battled Parkinson's Disease for over 20 years. "It is a terrible disease," he wrote, "and I am fully aware of what is happening. Totally incapable of living alone even for half a day, I went to live with the other seriously ill of our society. Good-bye fishing, hunting, baseball, trips, etc. How can I keep my vocation? How can I remain a priest? What is my reason for living? How can I find interest in life? How can I keep my dignity?... I know that my disease will get the best of me yet. I see it as a wild beast crouched in a corner of the arena of my life. I will fight and surrender only one inch at a time the ground of life that God gave me..." He was grateful to those who cared for him, especially at the Foyer Saint-Joseph in St. Basile, and the Foyer Notre-Dame in St. Leonard.

Unwavering Love

"One must continue to love, to be lovable, but we must apply energy to do this. One must pray, pray again, pray and pray some more, and it is very hard to pray when one is sick. I am called to transform my work by making the acquaintance of suffering. I tame it as best I can. As I have always been a down-to-earth, plodding person, slowly and patiently with God present I am still taking one step, and then another.... Here I am, Lord, to do your will... Incardinated in the diocese of Edmundston, I am always a priest, and my vocation has made me happy. It has made me realise the greatness of my baptismal life. Lord, I offer you my hands, my life. Hold me! Support me! I shall never be able to repay what I have received from my spiritual Mother, the Church."

The Hope of Resurrection

As we read these words of Father Plourde we cannot help but recall the words of Job: "Oh, would that my words were written down! Would that they were inscribed in a record: that with an iron chisel and with lead they were cut in the rock forever! But as for me, I know that my Vindicator lives, and that he will at last stand forth upon the dust; whom I myself shall see: my own eyes, not another's, shall behold him, and from my flesh, I shall see God, and he shall not turn away."

Gratitude

Thank you, Father Armand, for everything you were to our Church. Thank you for continuing to watch over it. Pray the Father for us to send workers to His harvest. Rest in peace. Enter into the joy of God.

+ François Thibodeau *gm*

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

04-18-07