



From A Bishop's Journal (727)

“The Gospel of Peace is Breaking Out in the Garden of God”

In a beautiful song about Acadia, the “Hymn to Hope,” one of humankind’s greatest dreams is expressed: “One day, one day perhaps we shall be true friends. I see that everything is already getting brighter in the night. Hope is at our windows, the hope that one day, perhaps, the sun shall rise on the side of freedom. One day, one day perhaps, no more soldiers and no more storms, we shall no longer play at courage-in-the-face-of-fear. One day, one day perhaps, once we have broken our chains, I shall tell you how much I love you, deep in my heart.”

Kingdom of Peace

I myself have sung this hymn very often, at countless sessions and meetings. The hymn could easily be a national anthem, as its denseness of feeling translates the deepest aspirations of our contemporaries. “One day, one day perhaps, well beyond our sorrow, we shall let go of hatred in the direction of the rain.” The Advent season prepares us for the final coming of the Kingdom of God, a kingdom of life and holiness, a kingdom of justice and peace, as the feast of Christ the King reminded us.

No Peace without the Respect of Human Rights

I introduce here my fifth volume of writings, entitled “The Gospel of Peace is Breaking Out in the Garden of God” [*Au jardin de Dieu, éclate l’Évangile de la paix*]. The book’s theme is the hope of peace. However, before all else we must take the time to measure the degree of peace in our own milieus. It is very important for us to see how the issue of peace is faring in our parts. Some would qualify this necessary exercise as a “diagnosis” of the health of human rights in our families, our work and recreational places, and even in those places where we have our liturgical gatherings. If the presence of respected human rights reveals a high quality of life, the absence of even one human right is a real threat to concrete peace. How does one talk of peace to a starving person or to a beggar who is in plain sight? We have been speaking a long time about basic needs, but have we considered them as fundamental human rights? I hope that the first chapters of the first part of the book help us see and appreciate this peace on a daily basis. Four simple questions could help us better grasp this reality: List briefly individual rights that are respected in your milieu, and by whom. Briefly enumerate collective rights that are respected in your milieu,

and by whom. Briefly list individual rights that are disregarded in your milieu, and by whom. Briefly list collective rights that are not respected in your milieu, and by whom.

Attuned to the Gospel and the Church

In the second part of the book we try to listen to the voice of the Church over the last 125 years, that is, since the publication of the first “social” encyclical to the recent pronouncements of Pope Benedict XVI. Faced with the changing situation of our societies, the last ten popes specified in turn the Church’s social teaching. This long reflection did not come about in a day. Several of these pages were written at the very time of fratricidal wars and violent battles, and they were reflections of what Jesus himself revealed to the world, from the age-old announcement of the coming of the Messiah to the culminating of the great mystery of the death and resurrection of the “Prince of Peace.” We notice that after the writings of Pope Leo XIII, the reflections of Pope John XXIII and Pope John Paul II are outstanding guides for humankind today. However, it is important for us to promote this rich teaching of the Gospel and of the Church Magisterium, and to spread its knowledge among our brothers and sisters. Throughout the twenty-one family and parish catecheses proposed, by stressing the revelation of peace, brief commentaries are given on the Lenten Sunday readings of years A, B, and C of the lectionary. As we proceed with the Gospel readings we shall discover, in the third part of the book, the peace that we must celebrate and pass on. We shall learn that peace is not only a human construct, however long and rich it may be, but that it is also a gift to be accepted and received, and more than a gift, since it is the God of Peace who comes to us to walk among us. The risen Emmanuel is in the midst of the garden that is given over to our care.

Seeds of Peace and Justice

In the last part of the book, entitled “A Peace That is Sown Every Hour,” we try to point out the actual places where it is good to “sow seeds of justice and truth,” “seeds of peace” that are beneficial to our generation and to those after us. If peace treaties have helped groups and nations make giant strides of humanity, how much more shall we live the Gospel of peace through our daily words and actions as “peacemakers,” as “sons and daughters of God?” The Good News of peace will bloom in the garden of God. I express my heartfelt gratitude to Madame Anne Sigier and her team for their confidence in me once again, in accepting to publish this fifth book of mine.

A Special CD

I am pleased to launch a CD of four songs of mine, composed these last few years. This shall take place at the book launching. The song, “Justice” was set to music by my friend Rénald Hébert; the song reminds us of the powerful teaching of Saint Basil the Great; the song *Jeunesse de chez nous* [“Youth of Ours”], that Mathieu Lang set to music in the summer of 2006, the song *Alliance* [“Covenant”], set to music by my confrere André Samson – this song can easily be used for catecheses on peace; and finally, the song *Artisan de paix* [“Peacemaker”], set to music by Livio Michaud, a few weeks ago. I thank Mr. Sylvio Belliveau, the coordinator of our youth

ministry office, for all his work with the artists of *Ode à l'Acadie*, to whom I am deeply grateful: They are most welcome to our parts for a maple sugar party!

On the day of my ordination as bishop, January 9, 1994, my Eudist confreres gave me a coat of arms composed of stylised olive branches, the symbol of peace, with a mitre and a pastoral staff. May they remind me always of the ministry of peace that has been given to me. With the Risen Jesus and Our Lady of Peace, I greet you with: Peace be with you!

+ François Thibodeau *gm*

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

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