



From A Bishop's Journal (743)

To Vote or Not to Vote in the Municipal Elections?

On May 12 of this year the citizens of New Brunswick will be “invited” to vote in the municipal elections. I say “invited,” because no law obliges us to exercise the right to vote which was won for us generations ago, after long debate.

Globalization vs. Responsibility

There being so many areas in life today that are not under citizen control, it is good for men and women of the same locality to freely decide on the local government to represent them. When we realise that a fair number of decisions regarding us and affecting us daily are made far from us and often despite our wishes, we dare hope that despite the narrow margin that is still left us by superior government, provincial and federal, every municipal council still has a certain freedom of action for the good of the local population. When we realise, for example, that price fixing, whether of fuel, milk, bread, flour, etc. is determined far from us, when we realise that our information media are controlled by outsiders, there is very little space left to us for free expression and immediate commitment: can the “municipality” still be or become once again “God’s garden” where it is good to live and grow?

The Municipality: A “Garden of God?”

I have already published five books under this title: *In the Garden of God Let Us Sow Love*, *Au jardin de Dieu semons l'espérance* (“In the Garden of God Let Us Sow Hope”), *Au jardin de Dieu, reconnaissons ses appels* (“In the Garden of God Let Us Recognise His Calls”), *Au jardin de Dieu, c'est plein de joie* (“In the Garden of God, It is Full of Joy”), and *Au jardin de Dieu, éclate l'Évangile de la Paix* (“In the Garden of God, Let the Gospel of Peace Break Out”). Let us carefully tend this “garden of God,” and let us recognise that every municipality is a garden of God, a garden where peace and harmony, joy and hope reign. As in Edmundston and Montreal, botanical gardens spread before us the beauty that springs from the earth; it can be so with every municipality in our province, as we give priority to our people and their aspirations. To the word “garden” I have added “of God” because our gardens, like our municipalities, are not just any kind of garden or any kind of municipality. They are places where the Lord hires us as His main partners: we are not the owners of this or that municipality, of this or that garden, we are just the main “stewards”, the first responsible of these municipalities and gardens. God gave to man and woman the care of the earth He created, to make it grow and bear fruit, and to live in fellowship with every human being. It is exciting to read, in the first chapters of the Book of Genesis, how the Lord was pleased of this first

garden He confided to the care of man and woman, calling on them to be fertile and to multiply, to fill the earth and subdue it. After Cain killed his brother Abel, the Lord asked Cain what he had done. It appears to me that God's dream of giving the earth to man and woman for them to be happy as members of the same family is a wonderful dream that can find a place in every municipality.

Basic Elements

However strange it may seem, even if our legislation and many municipal regulations are diversified and specialised, we must return to the basic elements of every human life. First of all, let us consider water and the environment. In our beautiful country bordered by three oceans and sewn through and through with countless streams and rivers, we must be very careful about our drinking water, to ensure that every citizen has access to quality water at minimum cost. Much work has been done to clean up our waste: of the 648 municipal landfills that were in our province ten years ago, there are only a few well-controlled ones left. Many campaigns are still needed to get people to recycle. And what about the many sources of electricity and propane gas, in our regions? What is their cost and quality? And our highways? Spring is the time of potholes, but generally speaking, are our municipalities concerned enough about the safety and comfort of our roads and highways? How do they handle snow removal? What about urban planning, emergencies, and building and development projects? How does your municipality deal with the poor, the homeless, the unprovided? Does your municipality have specific projects for youth and the elderly? Is your municipality sensitive to cultural issues and recreational activities? How are revenues and expenses managed? Is adequate information given? How do we prepare our youth to become the political leaders of tomorrow? Many issues are addressed by municipalities, but what is lacking is the wherewithal to respond. I have only pointed out a few of them to indicate that these questions must remain at the forefront, and solutions be found.

“Servant of Peace”

In these times of insecurity and even violence, there is one basic function that every municipality must first address, that of being a “servant” of peace. Forty-five years ago, Pope John XXIII published his encyclical *Pacem in Terris* (April 11, 1963), in which he wrote the following: “[I]n a culture and civilization like our own, which is so remarkable for its scientific knowledge and its technical discoveries, clearly no one can insinuate himself into public life unless he be scientifically competent, technically capable, and skilled in the practice of his own profession. And yet even this must be reckoned insufficient to bring the relationships of daily life into conformity with a more human standard, based, as it must be, on truth, tempered by justice, motivated by mutual love, and holding fast to the practice of freedom.” May my reflection help you, on May 12, 2008. May the election campaign help us grow in democracy and peace. I assure all of you who are dedicated to serving in your municipality of my daily prayer for you and your fellow citizens.

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