



From A Bishop's Journal (778)

Let Us Be A People of Hope

On November 25 I had the pleasure of assisting at the opening of the third session of the 56th Legislative Assembly of the Province of New Brunswick, in the company of His Worship the Mayor of Edmundston, following an invitation from the Edmundston/St. Basile M.P. This was a repeat of a similar invitation in 1994 to attend the opening of the Legislature under Premier Frank McKenna, and again in 1999, under Premier Bernard Lord. I wanted my presence at the Assembly to be an acknowledgement of the importance of the work accomplished daily in the Fredericton Parliament as well as in the individual ridings, by the elected representatives of the New Brunswickers. A number of times in my writings and addresses I reiterated my solidarity, friendship and daily prayer for all who are called to serve their fellow citizens, especially in times of crisis and distress.

Spem Reduxit

While trying to welcome the address of His Excellency the Lieutenant Governor on the province's future, in his Throne Speech, my eyes were fixed on the provincial coat of arms and its motto, *Spem Reduxit*, which means "To give back hope." These words are like an echo of the 2008 Advent theme song: "Let us be a people of hope, for God has so loved the world. Let us open our hearts to His presence: a Saviour has been born to us. Where are you, Lord, on our dusty, dead-end roads? Raise your heads, raise them up and see: I am your shepherd. What do you say, O Lord, in the silence and the darkness of our winters? Raise your heads, raise your heads and keep watch: I give you the Spirit. What do you do, O Lord, while so many brothers and sisters have lost all hope? Raise your heads, raise your heads and go: I am sending you to them. Who are you, O Lord, so different, so other, and so distant? Raise your heads, raise your heads, and listen: I carry you in my heart." These words and music of Father Yves Granger, S.C. accompanied me all through my third visit to Parliament, as I thought about all of these people involved in the financial crisis of today, and all the poor who suffer hunger and cold, and who are deprived of their basic needs of food, shelter, and heat.

Crisis: Decision

Some of you probably do not know that the word "crisis" comes from the Greek word for "decision," and a dictionary adds as explanation: "a perilous or decisive moment in the evolution of things, a periodic rupture of balance between production and consumption, with consequences of unemployment, bankruptcies and an important breakdown of the stock exchange..." What is paradoxical is to affirm that in periods of crisis one must not make decisions, when this is exactly

what must be done, to redress a decision or direction. A crisis can have serious negative effects, but it can also have positive ones according to the solutions found and readjustments made. The worldwide financial crisis brings home to us the social and economic disparities that have existed within our own communities, country, and the world as a whole. The Christmas season can even bring out even more strongly the expanse of these disparities between rich and poor, with the middle class decreasing more and more. While some can afford very expensive gifts, others hardly have enough to eat... The network of New Brunswick's 60 food banks cannot answer the needs that come to them; new clients and new families are added every day and, very often, grants to these food banks are discontinued.

The Audacity of Hope

These were my thoughts during the Throne Speech, as I could not help thinking that all these elected people, who are filled with compassion and a sense of justice, and driven by the power of the Spirit, could, if they really wanted to and overcoming all partisanship, find solutions to today's crises. Calls to solidarity have not been lacking: May the laws to be voted on not disappoint the population but bring real hope to those who are threatened to lose it. I thought also of Barack Obama's book, *The Audacity of Hope*. What he writes, about the values he cherishes, the American Constitution, politics, the opportunities to seize, and about faith, racism, and the family came to mind. He wrote that to say one thing during the presidential campaign and to do otherwise after the election makes one a two-faced politician. In the presence of all our MLAs, I thought that I, too, was in the presence of men and women of good will, who can be so bold that we can hope for an even more beautiful province, and this, without fooling ourselves.

Applying This Boldness

Of the 34 points of the Throne Speech, there is one that held my attention: the elaboration of a plan for the reduction of poverty, with participation of individuals, community not for profit organisations, and the business sector... I believe that such a plan is possible, but it will be demanding. Our government must not, like several others, find a way of defaulting on its greatest responsibility, that of protecting the most vulnerable members of our society. It is first of all for these people that they exist. For many years, now, social welfare checks have been very low, and we are forever cutting into basic and vital measures, such as heat and food. It is not only Christmas baskets that will satisfy the needs of the needy: Their poverty is greater than that, they are poor throughout the year. Daring to give the vital minimum to all, the boldness to give a fair salary to all men and women, to create stable employment, and to grant greater incentives to bring back home our young fellow citizens who left us for better work elsewhere: All of these are non-partisan, positive gestures than can be done.

Building the Kingdom of God

Every man and woman must work at building up a kingdom of life and justice, of truth and holiness, according to their God-given talents. *Spem Reduxit!*

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