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**« LIVING WITH THE HEART »**

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Pastoral Letter of Bishop François Thibodeau, Eudist, Bishop of Edmundston  
for the Feast of Pentecost, June 3, 2001  
and the Four Hundredth Anniversary of the Birth of Saint John Eudes (Nov. 14, 1601)

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My Dear Friends,

I write to you on this Pentecost Sunday to reflect with you on the 2000-2001 pastoral year, as well as on what our beloved Church might experience in the months to come. I make this reflection with Saint John Eudes as our guide, since he is eminently able to inspire our pastoral plan. St. John Eudes (1601-1680), spiritual father of the worldwide Eudist religious family left his mark not only on the religious life of France but also on that of the Church in North America and this, from the very beginnings, since several of our first missionaries knew this priest writer, preacher, and teacher.

In remembering Saint John Eudes I want to express on my own behalf and on behalf of the Edmundston Diocesan Church our gratitude to all the Eudists who worked and ministered here, to those who are still with us in ministry, and to those whose family roots are here. As far back as 1904 the Eudists were here, ministering in Southern Victoria, in the Tobique. They were the first priests in Plaster Rock and the first resident priests at Maliseet. Over one hundred fifteen Eudists worked and taught at St. Louis College, over a period of twenty-five years. We still have with us Father Eymard Duguay ministering in St. Jean-Baptiste and Notre-Dame-des-Prodiges parish in Kedgwick, Father Claude Côté, at Saint-François d'Assise, Clair, Saint-François-Xavier in Saint-François-de-Madawaska, and Notre-Dame-du-Rosaire, Connors. There is also Father Ernest Dumaresq at Saint-Léonard-Ville, Saint-Léonard-Parent, and Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes. Father Aurèle Godbout, provincial superior of the North American Eudist Congregation, also pursues his work at the Centre Sérénité in Edmundston; and I who am your bishop am now in my eighth year among you.

On this feast of the Holy Spirit, how could we not marvel at all that the Holy Spirit is and at everything He has accomplished in our Church, all these weeks and months ? How I wish that we say of us what was said of the Apostles and early disciples who had just received the Holy Spirit: « Each of us hears them speaking in his own tongue about the marvels God has accomplished! » (Acts 2:11) This amazement can only come from a grateful heart. How I wish that in the wake of the Acts of the Apostles we could express in our own terms all that the Holy Spirit has wrought in our Church! How I wish that each member of our Church could write about God's goodness on his or its behalf!

## **I – SONG OF PRAISE**

For his part, Saint John Eudes, whose 400<sup>th</sup> birthday we celebrate, wrote a song of praise and thanksgiving to the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary for their manifold blessings. Born in the village of Ri near Argentan in Normandy, France, November 14, 1601, he was ordained a priest December 20, 1625. His aim in life was to make of it an ongoing hymn of gratitude to the Hearts of Jesus and Mary.

My soul glorifies the wonderful Hearts of Jesus and Mary, and my spirit rejoices in this infinite Heart which is in me!

Yes, Jesus and Mary have given me their Hearts that I might live only in their love.

He has worked marvels for me, holy is his heart; he took me from my mother's womb  
The depth of my mother called forth the depths of his mercy.

This most gentle Heart has always filled me with sweet blessings.  
He has sheltered me in the palm of his hand, and protected me like the apple of his eye.

He has chosen me to be his priest, he has placed me in the ranks of the princes of his people;  
he placed his words in my mouth, and made my mouth a two-edged sword.

He made me die, he made me live, he has always accompanied me on my path;  
he fought off my enemies and delivered me from evil.

Oh loving Heart, source of all goodness, you have given me innumerable benefits.  
Praise to you! To you be love, to you be glory! May every tongue praise you, and every heart love you!

May your glory show forth in your mercies, in the wonders of your love.  
Be eternally blessed, praised, and glorified for your wondrous deeds!

May the Father of mercy remember your sacrifice,  
and may he fulfill all your desires!

Oh Heart of Jesus, it was for us that you offered yourself in love and suffering on the Cross;  
may our hearts be burnt forever in the fire of your love!

Oh Heart of Mary, pierced by the sword of your sorrows,  
make our hearts to be pierced by God's love for us!

Oh Hearts of Jesus and Mary, furnace of love, may our hearts be kindled in you for ever!  
May they remain in your flames, and may they make one heart forever with the Hearts of Jesus and Mary!

After each verse, students in Eudist colleges, universities and major seminaries, as well as people in Eudist parishes, answered: « *Gratias infinitas inenarrabilibus donis ejus* » (« *Everlasting thanks for his wonderful gifts* »).

In taking time to look at our own lives, we too could sing such a hymn of praise, a song of thanks for the wonderful gift of life, for the gift of a warm human family, for the benefits of health and work; a song of thanks for the gift of the earth and a country to call our own; a song of thanks for the gifts of baptism and the other sacraments, for the gift of God's Word, and for the Church. Yes, we give everlasting thanks for these wonderful gifts!

## **II – AT THE HEART OF THE JUBILEE**

The year 2000 Holy Year launched us along the road to a new millennium. It was a holy year commemorating the 2000<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Jesus our Saviour and Liberator, God-with-us. So many wonderful graces were showered on us during this holy period, especially the wonder of wonders, our personal encounters with Jesus himself in his Word, his sacraments, his Church, and in our neighbour: « Jesus yesterday, today, and forever! » Let us consider how much we have advanced in the past months, and we shall discover Jesus' own footsteps. Did we not in our daily pilgrimage meet Jesus, as we visited the sick or had a neighbourly chat, or during a liturgical celebration or in parish- or family-based religious education, at difficult moments in life as well as in days of joy along with the ordinariness of daily living? St. John Eudes was seized by the love coming from the Heart of God; he had been given the supreme gift of His love, in his encounter with Christ.

*Let us sing together the mysteries of the Heart of Jesus;  
let us celebrate the wonders of his adorable Heart.*

*Hail, victim of sorrows nailed to the cross, king of martyrs:  
may your cross be our glory and our love, our joy and our crown.*

*Heart of Jesus, wounded by love, wound our hearts of that same love;  
source of everlasting life, intoxicate us with love.*

*You are the victim of love, the salvation of all;  
you are the grace offered to all, the universal redemption.*

*Come, you people, hasten to the Heart full of love;  
he loves you all, trust in him, for he is love.*

*Love, Father all-good, Love, Saviour of all, Love, grace-giving God,  
yours be the kingdom for ever and ever.*

### III – HIS LIFE CONTINUED

So focussed was he on Jesus that John Eudes discovered that Christian life consisted in being an extension of Jesus's own life. In the following text he gives us his perception, his deep conviction regarding Christian life. More than the writer, what comes out is the apostolic preacher who instructs and teaches:

« Jesus, Son of God and son of man, King of men and of angels, God, our Saviour and our Sovereign Lord; he is also our head, and « we are members of his body, » as Saint Paul puts it (Eph. 5, 30). It follows that we are united to [Christ] in the most intimate union possible, comparable to the link there is between members and their head. Spiritually, we are united to him by faith and by the grace he gave us at holy Baptism. Bodily, we are united to him by the union of his most holy body with ours in the Blessed Eucharist. As a necessary consequence, just as the members are animated by the spirit of the head and live of the same life, so too must we be animated by the spirit of Jesus, live of his life, walk in his ways, clothe ourselves with his sentiments and inclinations, perform all our actions with the same dispositions and intentions with which he acted. In a word, we must continue and fulfill the life, religion and devotion which he had on earth. »

A keen student of Holy Scripture, Saint John Eudes repeats the same ideas using Gospel passages:

This proposition is based on the sacred words of the one who is Truth itself: « I am the Life. I have come that you might have life. I live and so will you. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me and I in you » (Jn. 14:6, 10:10, 14:19-20). In other words, just as I am in my Father, living of his life that he communicates to me, so are you also in me, living of my life, and I am in you, communicating that same life to you. Thus, I live in you and you live with me and in me. All these sacred texts teach us that Jesus Christ must live in us, that we must have no life but in him and that our life must be a continuation and expression of his. [...] St. Paul writes that he is fulfilling the sufferings of Jesus Christ. We can also rightly say that a true Christian, as a member of Jesus Christ united with him by grace, continues and fulfills the actions that Jesus performed while on earth by every one of the actions he performs in the spirit of Jesus. So, when a Christian prays, he continues and fulfills the prayer of Jesus; when he works, he continues and fulfills Jesus Christ's work life, and so on, in all the other actions done in a Christian manner.

So you see what Christian life is: a continuation and fulfilment of the life of Jesus. You see that our actions must be a continuation of Jesus' actions and that we must be so many other Jesuses on earth, in order to continue here his life and work, to do and suffer everything he wants us to do and suffer in a holy and divine way, in the spirit of Jesus, that is, with the divine and holy dispositions and intentions which Jesus had in all his actions and sufferings.

This was the basis of Saint John Eudes' teaching throughout his life. In 1637 he had already published a book called *The Life and the Kingdom of Jesus in Christian Souls*. The book quickly became known as « The Kingdom of Jesus ». In the book, its author condensed with penetrating clarity his ideas on Christian living,

on the nature of Christian life, its basis and its complete development through practice of the virtues. If an athlete must perform specific physical exercises daily, so must the Christian perform spiritual exercises on a daily basis. John Eudes suggests spiritual exercises for each day, in the morning, during the day, and at night. His book contains « a few principal and more necessary exercises to help one live in a Christian and holy way, and to develop, sanctify, and establish the reign of Jesus among us. » It was quite a challenge to recommend such exercises. *The Kingdom of Jesus* also contains « what must be done throughout life, each month, each year, each week... to live in a Christian way. » Here is what he suggests at the beginning of a task:

« Oh Jesus, may my work be accomplished in honour of the works you shouldered while on earth », and « Oh Jesus, nothing for me, nothing for the world, but everything for you, Oh my Saviour, all for your greater glory and for your pure love. »

#### **IV – AT THE HEART OF LIFE**

In a world where everything seems to go so fast, the significance which Saint John Eudes gives to our smallest actions can charge them with meaning. Hence we would be very far from the pessimistic declaration, « Vanity of vanities, all is vanity » (Eccl. 1:2). All our actions, whether at school or at work, in health centres, in pastoral work, in the economy, in politics, etc. all our daily actions are an extension of the very life of Jesus. This can energise our whole days. Our « Christian practice » is to be understood and extended throughout the day and the night: even our rest extends the rest that Jesus took. St. John Eudes often uses a surprising expression: « How to form Jesus within us. »

We must acquire the habit of seeing [Jesus] in all things, and having no other objective in mind than him and all his states and mysteries, virtues and actions, in all our devotions and actions. He is, indeed, all in all things. He is the being of all that exists, the life of all living things, the beauty of all things beautiful, the power of the powerful, the virtue of the virtuous, the sanctity of the saints. There is hardly any action of our ordinary life that does not find some counterpart in the actions he performed while on earth; so we must keep our eyes on his actions and imitate them when performing our own. By this means, we will fill up our understanding with Jesus, as we form and establish him in our own mind and by thus thinking of him often and seeing him in all things.

#### **V – SPIRIT OF JESUS**

Since today we celebrate the feast of Pentecost it would be good to read what he has to say about the Spirit. At times the word « Spirit » evokes the spirit of Jesus, and at other times it refers to the Holy Spirit. His writings as a whole refer to the Holy Spirit: the recent computerized analytical index of the complete works of Saint John Eudes comprises close to 200 pages of references by him to the Holy Spirit. He pays great attention to the Holy Spirit who formed Jesus in Mary and in each and everyone of us.

The Holy Spirit shared in making us Christians since he formed in Mary's womb the one who is our Redeemer, our Ransomer and our Head. He animated Christ and guided him in all that he thought, said, did and suffered, even to sacrificing himself on the cross, to make us Christians. [...] Once Jesus had ascended into heaven, the Holy Spirit came into the world to form and establish the Body of Christ which is the Church, and to apply to her the fruit of Christ's life and blood, of his passion and death. [...] Moreover, the Holy Spirit comes to us in Baptism to form Christ in us and incorporate us to him, to give us new birth and new life in him, to apply the effects of his blood and his death to us, to animate, inspire, heal and guide us in all we have to think about, say, do and suffer as true Christians for love of God. [...] What obligations we have to bless and love the Father, Son and Holy Spirit for having called us and raised us to the dignity of Christians! What kind of life must we lead ? One that is all holy, divine and spiritual because our Lord tells us that « what is born of the Spirit is spirit » (Jn. 3:6). Oh divine Spirit, I give myself totally to you. Possess and guide me in all things and

make me live as a child of God, a member of Christ, a being born of you and belonging to you which must be possessed, animated and guided by you.

## **VI – A COVENANT, A CONTRACT**

The texts I have just presented are meant to bring to mind the wonderful work done during the 2000-2001 pastoral year by parents, pastors and religious educators, to better prepare and celebrate the sacraments of Christian initiation. In new ways and certainly with new words and expressions, home- and parish-based religious education introduced our children to the basics of Christian living, to the Father, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the Church. I want to express my gratitude to those who gave so unstintingly of their time and energy to introduce others to the wonders of the Christian mystery. The same can be said concerning the forthcoming 2002 World Youth Days, a special opportunity for personal and community encounters with Jesus Christ. The WYD theme is *You are the light of the world. You are the salt of the earth*. Meetings of young believers from throughout the world, religious education, social commitment, and celebrations will be conducive, with the grace of God, to such a Christian experience. Saint John Eudes dedicated a good part of his life to presenting the wonders of baptism, through his preaching, conferences, and writings; he even composed a catechism for his parish missions. As a good Norman Frenchman, Saint John Eudes described baptism as a wonderful covenant of the human being with God, a contract with the Father who undertakes to consider us as he considers his Son, a contract with the Son who binds himself to consider, love and treat us as members of his body, bones of his bones, flesh of his flesh, and spirit of his spirit; a contract also with the Holy Spirit who undertakes to form Jesus in us as he once did in the womb of the Virgin Mary. If the Blessed Trinity has accepted this undertaking, we too, through our godparents, made a covenant with God through the baptismal contract: we offered, gave and dedicated ourselves to the divine Trinity with the obligation of renouncing Satan and all his works and attaching ourselves to Jesus in faith and love; in other words, we bound ourselves to live holy lives.

## **VII – CALL TO HOLINESS**

Harken to the Holy Spirit who tells you by the mouth of the Apostle: « It is God's will that you grow in holiness » (1 Thes. 4:3). You might say that this is well for those who live in cloisters and monasteries. To that my answer is that Religious must be holy and models of holiness because of their sacred profession and because they have all sorts of means to achieve holiness. But whoever is baptized is likewise obliged to be holy for many reasons. Holy, because of the name he bears: that of Christian which is most holy. Holy, because he is a child of him who is holiness itself and the source of all holiness. Holy, because through Baptism he received divine grace, a participation in the holiness of God, making all who are baptized and remain faithful to this holy grace « sharers in the divine nature » (2 P. 1:4). Holy, because through Baptism he is a member of a Head who is the Holy of holies, and of a most holy body, that is, a member of Jesus Christ and his mystical body, most holy Church.

And Saint John Eudes continues by listing even more reasons for answering the call to holiness of life. He then concludes with the following:

« You may ask how man, fragile, weak and miserable creature that he is, can be holy as God is holy. My answer is that although this is impossible in our human weakness, it is possible, even easy, with God's grace which he never refuses to those who are willing to ask for it. What must we do, then ? Only one thing, and one that is most delightful. What, indeed, is easier and more delightful than to love? What is more pleasant than to love the one who is infinitely good, beautiful, perfect and lovable; the one who is all goodness, beauty and perfection, who never caused any harm, but rather an infinite amount of good; the one who is all heart, all charity, all love for you? Love the most good and lovable God and you will be holy. »

## **VIII – AT THE THRESHOLD OF THE NEW MILLENNIUM**

These words of Saint John Eudes find an echo in Pope John Paul II's wonderful letter of January this year:

« The time has come to propose wholeheartedly to everyone this high standard of ordinary Christian living: the whole life of the Christian community and of Christian families must lead in this direction. In fact, to place pastoral planning under the heading of holiness is a choice filled with consequences. It implies the conviction that, since Baptism is a true entry into the holiness of God through incorporation into Christ and the indwelling of his Spirit, it would be a contradiction to settle for a life of mediocrity, marked by a minimalist ethic and a shallow religiosity. To ask catechumens: 'Do you wish to receive Baptism?' means at the same time to ask them: 'Do you wish to become holy?' It means to set before them the radical nature of the Sermon on the Mount 'Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect' (Mt. 5:48). »

## **IX – TEARS OF BLOOD**

Confronted with his country's dechristianisation, Saint John Eudes stated:

« One could shed tears of blood that so many on earth, who have been baptised and therefore admitted to the ranks of God's children as members of Jesus Christ and living temples of the Holy Spirit and therefore committed to live a life in harmony with these divine qualities, nevertheless live like beasts, pagans and, worse still, like devils; none behave as real Christians. What is the cause of such a great evil? There are several, but one of the main ones is that the great majority of these Christians are wrapped in such darkness and in such profound ignorance of things that are theirs, that they don't even know what it means to have been baptized. They do not know what it is to be a Christian. They hardly if ever consider the indescribable graces and incomprehensible favours that God has given them in holy Baptism, and they spend their entire lives without ever thinking about the solemn promises they made to his divine Majesty and the most important obligations they incurred in the holy Contract they made with Jesus, at Baptism.

## **X – A CALL TO PRAYER AND CONTEMPLATION**

In several places in the diocese people take time to pray and to have a prayer corner. Examples are the holy hours held in parish churches and institutions, the prayer time in senior citizens' homes, prayer groups, family prayer, and all those who ask for prayer or who use their suffering as special stepping stones to God. Convinced of the importance of prayer, Saint John Eudes wrote:

« The earth on which we live, the air we breathe, the bread we eat, the heart that beats in our chests are not as necessary to man for his bodily life as prayer is to Christian living. [Christian life which the Son of God calls eternal life consists in knowing and loving God. Now, it is in prayer that this divine science is learned]. Prayer is indeed a respectful and loving elevation of mind and heart to God. It is the Christian soul's tender dialogue, holy communication and divine conversation with its God. In this divine exercise, the Christian soul is united to God, the center of its being, its goal and its supreme good. [...] It is through prayer that the soul serves him, pays him homage, gives him adoration and love. In prayer it receives his enlightenment, his blessings and a thousand tokens of his exceedingly great love. [...] Consider prayer as the first, the principal, the most necessary, most pressing and most important of all your undertakings. »

## **XI – CALL TO MERCY**

If Saint John Eudes often called his contemporaries to holiness and to prayer, he also often reminded them of God's call to mercy.

« He is merciful who bears the miseries of the most wretched in his heart. »

Commenting on the fourth verse of the Virgin's *Magnificat* – where I took my episcopal and the diocesan motto: « His Love Is from Age to Age » (« Et misericordia ejus a progenie in progenies ») – he asks:

« What is this mercy ? It is our good Saviour. That is why the eternal Father is called the Father of mercies, because he is the Father of the Word made flesh who is mercy itself. Mercy requires three things: that it be compassionate for the distress of others; steadfast in alleviating the suffering of the hopeless; and that it go from will to effect.

« Be merciful as your heavenly Father is merciful. It is mercy that I desire, and not sacrifice » (Lk. 6:36; Mt. 9:13), Jesus said to his contemporaries. St. John Eudes was so totally convinced of this that he wanted the members of the Congregation of Jesus and Mary which he founded in 1643 to be « missionaries of mercy ». Two years earlier, in 1641, he had founded the Order of Our Lady of Charity to help women in dangerous situations of delinquency or prostitution. People of the twenty-first century hunger just as much for mercy; they thirst just as much for this Love [which] is from age to age. »

Our countrymen are just as appreciative today of acts of kindness and help offered in our midst throughout the year. The awarding of the Bishop Marie-Antoine Roy Prize was an opportunity to acknowledge all the marks of friendship and fellowship expressed to the handicapped, the sick, the bereaved, the poor, and battered women. The International Year of Volunteers is a special opportunity for us to acknowledge all these free and generous commitments.

## **XII – AN INVITATION TO BOLDNESS**

In the Constitutions of the Eudist Congregation it is asserted that « John Eudes, overpowered by the love of God, carried in his heart the pain and concerns of his brothers and sisters. He boldly blazed new trails for spreading the Kingdom of God. It is in Saint John Eudes that members of the Congregation draw their deepest inspiration. » When I consider all the pastoral initiatives which the leaders of our Christian communities had to take in order to respond to the new challenges of the Second Vatican Council, the Edmundston Diocesan Synod (1987-1990), and the new concerns and needs of our milieus, I cannot help but repeat the dictate of Saint John Eudes himself: « We have but one thing to fear, and that is to have too much fear and not enough trust ».

## **XIII – A CALL TO CONSECRATED LIFE AND TO MISSION**

Looking at the work being done by the Office of Vocations, especially the reactivation of the *Called by Name* vocation programme, looking at the steps taken by religious communities to encourage, with the grace of God, the rise of new vocations, I consider that the Lord has not stopped calling and challenging through the Church, through the situation of Christian communities both here and elsewhere, and through the needs of our brothers and sisters: more than ever the Lord is inviting to the consecrated life, the missionary life, and the priesthood. If a wild flower bears so many seeds for reproducing itself, how then could the Lord not have taken the means necessary to continue building up the Body of Christ ?

« Pray the Master of the harvest to send workers to his harvest, but pray that he send exemplary workers who do not seek their own interests, but whose only aim is the glory of their Master and the salvation of souls which he paid for with his precious blood. Pray him to give his Church shepherds and priests according to his heart, who follow the path he took when he was on the earth. »

« My dearest daughters, you have, in a way, but one and the same vocation with the Mother of God. For, just as God chose to form his Son within her, and in the hearts of the faithful through her agency, so too he called you to the holy community in which you are now so that his Son might live in you, and through you restore him to life again in the souls in which he has been allowed to die. What a holy vocation! How prodigious is God's goodness to have called you to a truly apostolic Order! »

« Go in the name of the Blessed Trinity, to make it known and adored in places where it is neither known nor venerated. Go in the name of Jesus, the only Son of God, to bring to souls the fruits of his Precious Blood which he shed for them. [...] Go in the name and on behalf of our little Congregation, to accomplish in China and the other places where Providence directs you what we should like to do throughout the whole world, even to shedding our last drop of blood: destroy Satan's tyranny there and establish the Kingdom of God. »

#### **XIV – FORMING JESUS IN US**

If for John Eudes Christian living is continuing the life of Jesus in us, he never stopped repeating that it is through the Holy Spirit that Jesus is « formed » in us. « Forming Jesus in us » is an important requirement for every baptised and confirmed person, an activity which, we can say, is continually « measurable. » If we want to know whether we are successful in forming Jesus in us, all we have to do is to look at our prayer life, at how we share with others, relate to others, are available to them, and open to events. Holiness is far from being some kind of fluffy object! Forming in us the compassionate Jesus, the praying Jesus, the obedient Jesus, the Jesus available to all... these are as many facets of continuing Christian formation not only for religious communities but also for prayer groups, Bible sharing groups, etc.

The mystery of mysteries and the work of works is the formation of Jesus in us. St. Paul puts it in these words: « My little children, I must go through the pains of giving birth to you all over again until Christ is formed in you » (Gal. 4:19). It is the greatest mystery and the greatest work ever accomplished either in heaven or on earth [...]. So, forming Jesus in us should be our wish, our concern and our chief occupation, that is to say, causing him to live and reign in us together with his spirit and devotion, his virtues and sentiments, his inclinations and dispositions. This should be the aim of all our acts of piety. This is the task that God puts into our hands for us to work at continually.

#### **XV – FORMATION OF PASTORS, PREACHERS, CONFESSORS AND MISSIONARIES**

Like Jesus who had pity for the crowds « because they were tired and worn out, like sheep without a shepherd » (Mk. 6:34), Saint John Eudes wanted to give the Church many qualified priests. Contacts he had with people on his parish mission rounds made him aware of how urgent it was for him to help reform the clergy: and so it was that he founded a seminary at Caen in France. To do this he left his Oratorian community at Caen, of which he was the superior, and on March 25, 1643 he, along with a few other fellow priests, founded a congregation which, besides giving parish missions and retreats would look after the spiritual and doctrinal formation of priests and candidates to the priesthood. During his lifetime he founded five seminaries and a college. At the time of the French Revolution, the Eudists were in charge of over fifteen seminaries. At the request of the Archbishop of Halifax the Eudists came to Canada in 1890, and in 1895 they founded Holy Heart Interdiocesan Seminary, to give the Atlantic region of Canada numerous priests and bishops. Like Saint John Eudes, the directors of these seminaries never stopped reminding their subjects of the greatness and dignity of the priesthood. « The priest is a living image of Christ, and so he must be clothed in Christ's

holiness. » Our diocesan seminary which was founded August 4, 1995 wants to continue giving our Church holy priests. For the last six years, our pastoral formation service has been involved in the training of competent pastoral agents who, with the priests, minister to our Christian communities in both the French and English sectors. The aim of parish pastoral teams is to give our Christian communities qualified leadership rather than having only one person – the priest – carrying the burden of Christian leadership.

## **XVI – MANY WRITINGS**

Saint John Eudes composed many works for priests, preachers, pastors, and confessors.

« Oh priests, [...] you are the eyes, the mouth, the tongue, the heart of the Church of Jesus; better still, you are Jesus' very eyes, mouth, tongue and heart. You are his eyes. It is through you that the Good Shepherd continually watches over his flock. [...] You are his mouth and his tongue. It is through you that he speaks to his people. Through you he continues to preach the gospel that he preached in person when he was on earth. You are his heart. Through you he imparts life: the life of grace on earth and the life of glory in heaven to all the true members of his body. [...] A priest is truly another Christ living and walking on earth. He takes Christ's place, represents his person, acts in his name and exercises his authority. »

« Preaching is making God speak. Having spoken to mankind of old through the prophets of the Old Testament and by his Son in the new Law, God now wants to speak to us through the members of his Son, to make known his desires and prompt us to act accordingly. Preaching is giving God's children the bread of life, and of eternal life, to enrich, strengthen and perfect in them the divine life they received from the heavenly Father in their new birth in Baptism: 'You have the words of eternal life' (Jn. 6:69). [...] As God's heralds and Jesus' ambassadors, dispensers of his mysteries and oracles of the Holy Spirit, they must be clothed with the virtues of the Son of God, possessed and animated by the love, zeal, and strength of his divine Spirit. »

« What is a pastor after God's heart ? He is a real father to God's people, with a heart filled with truly fatherly love for his children. That love prompts him to work unceasingly to nourish his flock with the bread of the sacred Word and of the sacraments, to clothe the faithful with Christ and the Holy Spirit, to enrich them with all possible advantages regarding their eternal salvation. He is an evangelist and an apostle whose chief work is to preach, both publicly and privately, by word and example, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is to continue and perpetuate the functions the Apostles were commissioned to perform, and to practise the virtues they practised. [...] He is a living image of Christ in the world, the Christ who watched, prayed, preached, catechised, worked, went from town to town and village to village, suffering, agonizing, dying and sacrificing himself for the salvation of all the souls created in his image and likeness. »

« If preaching is the soul of mission, then confession is its heart. Preachers only trace out the work of salvation, but confessors perfect it. Preachers are sent by God to make known God's will to men, and confessors see that God's will is carried out. Preachers are the trumpets of heaven arousing men to war against sin; confessors are the soldiers who kill sin in men's souls. »

## **XVII – MISSIONARY SUCCESSES**

Thinking about the many retreats which were held in the diocese, the three-day retreats, the novenas and sessions of all kinds that took place; when I consider the adult religious education programmes, the spiritual renewal programmes, the « missions » that were held in the wake of our Diocesan Synod, I am reminded of one of St. John Eudes' letters – nearly 250 of which are preserved at the Eudist Archives in Paris – where he writes about the success of one of the nearly 200 « missions » he himself preached in his 55 years of ministry. The letter, dated July 23, 1659, is a summary of what was done at these missions, of the crowds

gathered, and of the problems met. A mission could last anywhere from 15 to 45 days. His letters give us a better idea of what led him and the members of his Congregation to be « evangelisers-formators ». Could his letter inspire us for a new evangelisation ? If it can evoke nostalgia for great crowds, it can also encourage us to work in base communities and parish community cells, where perseverance and learning are the order of the day.

« I cannot begin to tell you about the blessings which God has showered on this mission; it is something prodigious! I have not been preaching inside the church for a long time, now; despite the fact that it is large, it is still too small for the occasion. I can honestly say that on Sundays more than fifteen thousand attend. There are twelve confessors, but I do not exaggerate by saying that fifty would be kept quite busy. People come from eight to ten leagues around, and hearts are so touched by God that all we see are the tears and the weeping of the poor penitents. The fruits which the confessors see in the tribunal are wonderful. But what is painful is that we shall not be able to confess more than a quarter of the people. We are overwhelmed. The missionaries come across some people who have been waiting as many as eight days and who will still not be able to go to confession, who throw themselves at the confessors' feet wherever they meet them, pleading with tears and folded hands for them to hear their confession. It is now six weeks that we are here. Oh, missions are such a great good, and how needed they are! ».

It is in this letter that he challenges the priests in universities, just as Saint Francis Xavier had done:

« Let us pray the Master of the harvest to send workers, and let us say with all our heart: 'Master of the harvest, send workers to your harvest.' What are so many doctors and bachelors doing, while souls are perishing by the thousands because there is no one to offer a hand to keep them from being lost and preserve them from the everlasting flames ? If I listened to myself I would surely go to Paris to shout in the Sorbonne and the other colleges: 'Fire! Fire! Hellfire is setting the world ablaze! Come, honourable doctors, come, you bachelors, come, reverend sirs, to help put it out! »

### **XVIII – The Life of Jesus in Mary**

I want to conclude this bird's eye view of our 2000-2001 pastoral year in the light of the spirituality of the man popes called « father, doctor and apostle of the liturgical worship of the Hearts of Jesus and Mary » – Saint John Eudes – with a prayer of his. On this fiftieth anniversary of the 1951 Saint Basile Marian Congress, and the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first Mass celebrated in the Madawaska region, it is well to recall the earnest devotion which our people have always had for the Virgin Mary, Mother of Jesus.

« Oh Jesus, only Son of God and only Son of Mary, I contemplate and adore you living and reigning in your most holy Mother. St. Paul says: 'You are all and do all in all things' (Eph. 1:23; 1 Cor. 12:6) [...] You are her life, her soul, her heart, her spirit, her riches. You are in her, sanctifying her on earth and glorifying her in heaven. [...] Blessed are you, Oh Jesus, for all that you are and all that you accomplish in your most holy Mother! [...] Oh Mother of Jesus, I honor and venerate your most holy and admirable life in your Son Jesus [...] which he communicates to you from moment to moment by a most particular and ineffable favor. Blessed are you, Oh holy Virgin, for all the honor you have given your beloved Son in your whole life. I offer you all my life, Oh Mother of life and grace, and I consecrate it all to the honor of your life. [...] Oh Jesus, God of my life and my heart, you have a great desire to dwell in me and make me live in you an entirely holy and heavenly life. [...] Dwell in all your fulness in my spirit, heart and soul, and accomplish there all the works you desire for your glory. »

« Don't you know that [...] not only does Jesus live and remain continually in the Heart of Mary, he is himself the heart of her Heart. So, to have recourse to the Heart of Mary is to come to Jesus; to honor the Heart is

to honor Jesus; praying to the Heart of Mary is praying to Jesus. This admirable heart is the prototype and model of our own hearts. »

« The Heart of the Blessed Virgin is the vessel and the faithful guardian of the marvellous mysteries of the life of our Savior. 'Mary kept all these things in her Heart' » (Luke 2:19).

## **XIX – WORDS OF LOVE**

I hope that the song I composed a few months after my episcopal appointment, August 19, 1993 – at the time of the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Congregation of Jesus and Mary – reflects the importance of living with the heart, as Saint John Eudes did:

Our whole being is a gift of your grace:  
May our lives be dedicated to you!  
Our days, our nights are a pure offering to you:  
May our lives proclaim your praise!

To live.  
To live with the Heart  
The mission of Jesus  
In the midst of the world!

Our story is a Covenant of Life:  
May each day reveal your presence!  
Our tears, our joys are pure offering to you:  
May our hearts be gratitude to you.

Our future is in your hands, Oh Lord:  
May the Gospel transform the world!  
Our plans and our struggles are pure offering to you:  
May your Spirit revive our hope!

The love of God was really manifest throughout this pastoral year. « Gratias infinitas super inenarrabilibus donis ejus »

May the Virgin Mary and her divine Son grant us their many blessings.

*+ François Thibodeau*

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