
DEAR BISHOP LACROIX



My heartfelt thanks to the Edmundston Diocese population for their every mark of sympathy, friendship and solidarity tendered to me on the occasion of the death of Bishop Lacroix. Those were days of mourning but days, also, of gratitude for the diocese having had such a shepherd.

Bishop Fernand Lacroix leaves a souvenir of goodness and generosity. He was a man of faith as regards the people of Edmundston who were entrusted to his care, as well as in relation to the Lord himself. Suffering from various illnesses, he nonetheless never exhibited any kind of discouragement, surrendering in all things to the will of God. Enthralled with the Word of God, he sought to share it with his brothers and sisters to the very end. To the Church of Edmundston as to his Eudist congregation, he will remain an evangeliser and a developer of good Gospel workers. Let us ask him for our Church that numerous vocations and holy spring up, as well as a Church capable of pursuing the wonderful work of the Good Shepherd.

INFINITE MERCY

In a decree that I have just published, I have reminded all the priests of the infinite love of our God who offers us, during this Lenten season, His ever new and eternal Covenant. God is rich in mercy; He gives us His Redeemer Son and the life-giving Spirit; He calls us to be signs of His love, of His fidelity, and of His mercy, from day to day. In recalling that the sacrament of penance and reconciliation remains always the habitual path to the Father, I have granted to all parish priests, religious orders and other institutions, authorization to proceed with communal penance celebrations and to grant collective absolution during Lent and Advent 1994 to all who participate in such a celebration of forgiveness.

PRIESTS' SENATE

On 17 February I convened the priests who were members of the priests' senate until the episcopal appointment on October 20. Upon the announcing of a new bishop all councils, with the exception of the college of consultors, are dissolved. It is the new bishop's prerogative to reactivate them during his first year, taking care to review the constitutions and composition of these councils.

This meeting [with the former priests' senate] allowed me to get to know better the expectations and attitudes of the priests of our diocese. I have discovered among them great generosity as well as a deep desire to serve the communities entrusted to their care. The priests I have met have expressed their determination to take up - with the help of our religious and lay people - the challenges of this end-of-century. Pope John Paul II's post synodal exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* on priestly formation will be a major reference point for our reflection and activities. The priests' senate must study first of all "questions relating to the holiness of priests, the sacred sciences, and other needs of the priests" (Directory of Bishops for Their Pastoral Ministry). According to this same Directory, "the bishop must dedicate the best of his love and solicitude to his priests and those aspiring to sacred ministry."

In such a context, I have sent a first pastoral letter to all the priests and seminarians of the diocese, in which I reiterate my attachment and love as well as my desire to promote a most energetic vocation ministry. From May 9 to 12, a meeting that seems most promising will take place at the Maison Notre-Dame-de-la-Paix in Ste-Anne-de-la-Pocatière, on the theme *Priests and Shepherds according to the Heart of God*.

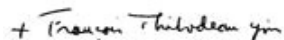
PROVISIONAL EPISCOPAL COMMITTEE

On February 23 I had my first meeting with the Provisional Episcopal Committee which I had set up the day after my episcopal ordination, to gather and study that keep on coming regarding the consultation I effected. All members of the diocese can obtain from their parish priest a copy of this questionnaire which was sent out January 12. I thank all those who wrote to me on the subject: the expectations noted will guide me in the different steps I undertake. I already have the feeling that it will be most important to make a prolonged pastoral visit in each parish and deanery, in the next three years; besides, it is indispensable that there be in each parish, before January 1966, a temporal affairs committee and a parish pastoral council. I shall return to this later.

CONTACTS

These past few days, besides visiting the parish of St.-André, I was pleased to visit the Grande-Rivière Irving plant, where I met a most courteous personnel. The quality of the work performed inspires the workers' daily lives. Along with them I bless the Lord for this work they have, to make a living, develop their aptitudes and help in bringing happiness to the entire community. I was also pleased to visit R.A.D.O. [soup kitchen-sheltered workshop] in Edmundston, an indispensable agency for a town like ours. Have a good week!

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

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