
A MISSION OF SOLIDARITY



From January 4 to 11, 1995, I shall be part of a mission of solidarity to Bishop Samuel Ruiz Garcia of the diocese of San Cristobal de las Casas, in southern Mexico. In mid-December, 70-year-old Bishop Ruiz undertook a fast so that the rights of the native people of his country be respected. On January 1, 1994, the day inaugurating the NAFTA Treaty between Mexico, the United States, and Canada, the Chiapas Indians attacked the local police force. The rebellion was crushed by the army, the most basic human rights were trampled on, and there were countless innocent victims. Bishop Ruiz condemned the use of violence by the native people and the brutality of the army. On 12 January 1994, the Mexican bishops stated that "The situation of numerous native and rural people is one of misery which is absolutely contrary to God's plan. That same January 12, 100,000 people demonstrated in Mexico City's main square, in support of the native people's grievances. I beg for your fervent prayers on my behalf, so that this gesture of ecumenical solidarity I shall make on behalf of the Canadian bishops contribute to a non-violent solution to the situation.

FIRST ANNIVERSARY

Next Monday - January 9 - will mark the first anniversary of my episcopal ordination and the beginning of my ministry among you. In Mexico on that day, I shall celebrate the Eucharist for your intentions. On Sunday, January 15, this anniversary will be marked at a celebration I shall be presiding at the Cathedral at 11:30, on the occasion of the Mass for Artists. The Canadian Liturgical Calendar for 1995 notes this anniversary and states a few teachings of Vatican Council II regarding this and states that it is good to pray to God, on this occasion.

THE BISHOP'S FUNCTIONS

"The bishop must be seen as the high priest of his flock; the Christian life of his faithful depends on him, in a certain sense." "Bishops have received the ministry to the community, to be exercised with the help of priests and deacons. In God's name they watch over the flock of which they are the shepherds, through the doctrinal magisterium, the priesthood of sacred worship, and the ministry of governance. In an eminent and visible manner, bishops stand in the place of Christ the Master, Shepherd, and Pontiff, and play his role."

PRAYER FOR THE BISHOP

The Liturgical Calendar invites us to pray for the first shepherd of the diocese on the occasion of his anniversary and this, for special reasons: "So that he may lead the people to Christ, the supreme shepherd," "So that he faithfully and courageously proclaim the Gospel," "That he may be, among his people, a living witness of Christ's love," "That he lead his brothers and sisters in the building up of a living, dynamic Church." I gratefully thank you for all your prayers on my behalf.

TWELVE MAJOR COMMITMENTS

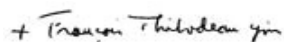
Such an anniversary urges me to review the twelve commitments I promised to carry out in the course of my episcopal ministry. On January 9, 1994, when Bishop Gerard Dionne asked me, in the presence of Bishop Fernand Lacroix and Archbishop Donat Chiasson, and numerous bishops, priests, and faithful, whether it was my wish to

discharge the ministry given to the apostles, I answered Yes in faith, hope and charity. I committed myself to discharge to the end of my life the office of the apostles entrusted to me, I replied Yes, with the grace of the Holy Spirit. I promised to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ faithfully and tirelessly, and to keep in its integrity the deposit of faith according to the Tradition received from the Apostles, to work at building up the Church as the Body of Christ, to remain united to this Church within the order of bishops; to faithfully obey the successor of the apostle Peter; as a devoted father, to sustain the people of God and guide them in the way of salvation; to show kindness and compassion in the name of the Lord to the poor and to strangers, and to all who are in need; as a good shepherd to seek out the sheep who stray and to gather them into the fold of the Lord; to pray without ceasing for the people of God, and to carry out the duties of one who has the fullness of the priesthood. Such was the solemn commitment I made on January 9, 1994. Many among you were witnesses to this.

REVIEW

It had been my wish to join the francophone bishops of Canada from January 3 to 7, 1995, in a retreat now being held in Sillery [Québec] and facilitated by Archbishop Bertrand Blanchette of Rimouski. I had planned on taking part, on Friday January 6, in the episcopal ordination of two new auxiliary bishops of Québec City, Bishops Jean-Pierre Blais and Eugene Tremblay... but the mission to Chiapas that was requested of me has more than altered my plans. I shall nevertheless make it a point to make a review of the commitments I made, to see whether I have been able to at least begin to respond to the different expectations regarding the bishop of Edmundston, at the time of the survey that was made last February, March, and April.

Have a good week!



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

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