
THANKS FROM THE HOLY FATHER



I am pleased to convey to you a letter I have just received from the Vatican Secretariat of State: "On the occasion of his seventy-fifth birthday, you sent in your name and that of the priests, seminarians, and the entire diocese of Edmundston, warm greetings to the Holy Father. It is my pleasure to transmit to you the thanks of His Holiness who greatly appreciates the regard you show for the accomplishment of his mission on behalf of the Church and the world. On his part the Pope - who gives thanks to God for His many gifts and who counts on your spiritual support - prays for you and for the people of your diocese, so that all may daily respond to the call of the Lord and work at the building up of His Kingdom as well as at Church unity. In placing you in the care of the Virgin Mary, Mother of God and Mother of the Church, he wholeheartedly gives to all his Apostolic Blessing."

THE SAINT JOHN RIVER

A tradition takes us back 391 years: People of Maine, Québec, and New Brunswick who live along the Saint John River have established an interesting custom, that of ringing church bells at 12:15 P.M. on June 24 in remembrance that on that day so long ago our beautiful river was christened the Saint John. This custom of bell ringing should be continued. A few days ago I received a beautiful map of the Saint John River, published by the St. John River Society (P.O. Box 20105, Fredericton, N.B., E3B 6Y8). A very beautiful map which I recommend... Here are a few extracts [tr. L.G.]:

From the wooded depths of Maine to the Bay of Fundy on the New Brunswick coast, the St. John River winds along a distance of 673 kilometres (418 miles). One of the longest bodies of water along the eastern coast of North America. The multiple facets of the personality it reveals along its journey to the sea make it also one of the most magnificent water courses. At the head of the River one is in the midst of the northern Maine wilderness dotted with lakes, tributaries and woods enterprises. One of its branches marks off the Québec boundary along 55 kilometres; as a matter of fact, several tributaries have their source in that province. A little further, in Maine, the river joins with the wilderness river of the Allagash, a 150-kilometre corridor that was one of the first river networks in the United States to be declared a natural and scenic river. When the river reaches the New Brunswick border, the Saint John becomes somewhat calmer. Farms and towns have been carved out of the natural forest scenery that reaches the river shore. The river wends its way as a border river for another 110 kilometres; it takes on its Canadian citizenship just above Grand Falls where it drives into the hills of one of this country's largest potato producing regions. Human influence is visible along this section of the river, with three hydroelectric dams that harness it for long stretches... From beginning to end, the River is the framework of a rich history stretching far back before the arrival of Europeans. For the Maliseet Indians, the river was the "Woolastooq," the good and generous river... The Saint John River was christened on June 24, 1604, feast of St. John the Baptist, when the Sieur des Monts - Samuel de Champlain Expedition dropped anchor at the mouth of the river.

REMAIN FOCUSED ON THE MISSION

The appointments I made in order to respond to the needs of the 33 parishes as a whole and of the 60,000 people who form the Edmundston Diocese may have brought satisfaction to several Christian communities; an example of this is the parish of Kedgwick which had had no priest since March 15... These

appointments may also have caused disappointment to the parish priest, the parishioners, and... the bishop. In the Church, what is required to keep the changes from becoming negative is to keep our focus on the Mission. Basically, mission is sending forth; the Church is a missionary Church. It issued forth from the mission of Jesus and of the Spirit, according to the Father's grand design. The missionary Jesus urges us to always go out to others.

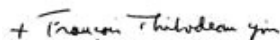
When I consider the generosity of those priests to whom I have given a new mission, I am amazed by their response and the apostolic availability they manifested despite the pain of separation. It is in fidelity to their word given at ordination and constantly renewed, it is out of love for those to whom they are sent, that they are so devoted to duty and so courageous. I congratulate those parishioners who accept the hard sacrifices brought about by these changes for the cause of the Gospel and of our Church. Because of the coming of a few priests from outside the diocese, the changes were not as numerous as they could have been. We owe the Lord a large debt of gratitude!

EPISCOPAL COMMISSION

I have been part of the Episcopal Commission for Social Communications for the french Sector of Canada since last fall. Other members of the Commission are Bishops Roger Ebacher of Gatineau-Hull [Québec], Antoine Hacault of St. Boniface [Manitoba], Bernard Hubert of St-Jean-Longueuil [Québec], and Jean-Louis Plouffe of Sault-Ste-Marie [Ontario]. At the June 20 meeting, one of the main topics on the Commission's agenda was the situation of social communications in the Atlantic Provinces francophone dioceses: Moncton, Bathurst, Yarmouth, and Edmundston. Mr. Jean Pedneault of the *Journal Le Madawaska* and former director of Office of Communications of our diocese, was main speaker. He was in a good position to speak on the state of the question; he could talk about what he has experienced in the Atlantic region, these 26 years.

For my part, I told the Commission members of what I have been able to observe, these past few years. It seems to me that the mission of the Office of Social Communications is first and foremost the fostering of communion between those in charge of Christian communities and the population as a whole. This mission is not always a sinecure, but it must reflect the Gospel message. The director of communications, like all who have an ecclesial responsibility, must be first of all a person of relationship, a bridge builder in truth, justice, freedom, and charity; he or she is an important person in the building up of the Christian community. These are, to me, four basic attitudes: truth, justice, liberty, charity. They are attitudes to be promoted when there is question of persons or groups. In the Edmundston Diocese we are truly privileged to have the kind of relationship that exists between the Diocese and the media. There is an excellent atmosphere of respect, solidarity, and mutual help, and I hope that this continue for along time to come. It has been my desire to always respect those in charge and to stress the importance of each person, of each medium, and I must say that the media have always made this easy for me.

Have a good week!



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

« From A Bishop's Journal » (074) (28 June 1995)