
A COMFORTING PRESENCE



During the summer it is important to take time for reflection and contemplation, for sharing and prayer. May the following excerpts from my 1997 Pastoral Letter be an in this matter.

« I WAS ELDERLY »

Elderly people among us are getting greater in number. They are justly considered courageous pioneers who helped in the development of our villages and towns, and who passed on to us the precious heritage of a strong faith, boundless courage, an exceptional tradition of mutual help, vigour and resourcefulness worthy of mention. Life did not always favour them, they have had to struggle to live and survive. If several of our elderly can now enjoy more agreeable days than before, such is not the case for those seniors whom age has condemned to poverty and loneliness. The living conditions of these people must constantly be the focus of our concern, because we owe them so much. If the gospels mention a few elderly people like Simeon and Ann who recognised the saviour of humankind in the child being brought to the Temple, we must in turn recognise Jesus who chose to be with the elderly. Older brothers and sisters, you are presence of Jesus passing on the deepest values to the other generations.

« I WAS A MISSIONARY »

The feast of Pentecost - like that of the Epiphany - invites us to turn our gaze towards our brothers and sisters throughout the world, to introduce them to the Gospel of Jesus. There is no other name under heaven that is given us than that of Jesus through whom we must be saved. [Cf. Acts 4:12] The mission of the Redeemer Christ is still far from being completed. It is the Spirit who urges us to proclaim God's mighty deeds. The Church has never had more than now the opportunity to spread the Gospel by word and witness, to everyone and all peoples. The dawning of a new missionary age is close at hand, says Pope John Paul II; it will become a bright day, bearing much fruit. Our diocesan Church rejoices in the fact of the presence of men, women, and young people from our midst, in other Churches: their witness stimulates our daily commitment. Missionaries, you are presence of Jesus sent by the Father, in the midst of the world.

« I WAS A RELIGIOUS »

Our diocesan Church rejoices in the fact that it has no fewer than 250 religious priests, brothers, and sisters. We owe them an enormous debt of gratitude for all they have done in the fields of pastoral work and education, social and health services, and for all they accomplish today as remarkable partners in the mission of Jesus. I know that the people of our diocese can appreciate the greatness of this amazing contribution to the life of our Church. A few months before being appointed bishop I had joined in the celebration marking the 350 years of the Eudist Congregation, an unforgettable festivity to warm the hearts of those who joined the festivities. This year is the 75th anniversary of the founding of the congregation of the Filles de Marie-de-l'Assomption and the 50th anniversary of the arrival of the Marist Sisters in Canada, at Saint Leonard. Next year will mark the 125th anniversary of the arrival of the Hôtel-Dieu Sisters in the Madawaska Region. Religious priests, brothers and sisters, through your

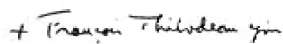
lives consecrated to the Blessed Trinity, you are a favoured sign of the brotherly and loving presence of Jesus, Religious of the Father, in the midst of the world.

« I AM YOUR BROTHER »

These words from scripture [Cf. Genesis 45:3] which my predecessor Bishop Gérard Dionne adopted as his episcopal motto remind us of the wonderful reality that we are all brothers and sisters; one fellowship binds us to the men and women of all times and continents, whatever their condition of life and work. On Jesus' lips these words remind us that we are all of the same race because of his taking flesh among us. At the heart of the most painful situations, whether family problems or social and economic ones, it is Jesus who reminds us, "I am your brother." In the midst of spousal and family violence, in the midst of brutal discrimination, at the very heart of those dramas caused by drugs and other mind-altering substances, can we not hear behind the cries of our brothers and sisters the very voice of Jesus challenging us? Victims of violence in all its forms, you are presence of Jesus, our abused brother, in the midst of the world.

IN THE MIDST OF OUR COMMUNITIES

« *Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.* » « *And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.* » [Matthew 18:20, 28:16] Two declarations of Jesus which reveal to us his desire to remain with us, but also a declaration of a deeper mystery: Jesus gave his life so that we could become a nation, one that offers itself to God, one which proclaims and serves God. This was the main topic of my 1996 Pastoral Letter. To discover the presence of Jesus at the heart of our gatherings is to discover also the priceless value of the Sunday gathering, the place of our weekly being-sent-forth to our respective milieus. This is one of the privileged places of the Lord's presence. He stands among his people to share with them the bread of the Word and of the eucharist. The first communities were of one mind and one soul, they devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. [Cf. Acts 2:42] Members of our Christian communities, you are presence of Jesus in the midst of your world, a presence that is full of hope because you proclaim the coming again of Christ in all his glory.



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