
« AN OFFICE ENTRUSTED BY THE APOSTLES »



On January 8, 1998, I shall be marking the fourth anniversary of my episcopal ordination. Reminiscing, it seems that I can still hear Bishop Dionne asking me, at the beginning of the ordination: « *My brother, are you resolved by the grace of the Holy Spirit to discharge to the end of your life the office the apostles entrusted to us, which we now pass on to you by the laying on of hands?* »+ And I dared answer: **Yes, I accept this office in the service of the people of God, and I commit myself to carrying it out until death, with the grace of the Holy Spirit. »*

WONDROUS MINISTRY

According to Vatican Council II which Bishop Dionne fittingly referred to, bishops represent in an prominent and visible manner Christ himself, who is Master, Pastor, and High Priest. « *The bishop leads his diocese as vicar and legate of Christ for his Church. »* Then Bishop Dionne quoted Saint Thomas à Becket, the twelfth-century archbishop of Canterbury and English martyr: « *Since we are charged with representing Christ on earth, we have been given the glorious tittle of bishop. We have replaced the apostles and apostolic men at the summit of the Church hierarchy, so that through our ministry the empire of sin and death be brought down. On the day of our consecration, we promised to guard the teaching so as to nourish the faith of our people. »*

CALL TO PRAYER AND COLLABORATION

I remember Bishop Dionne's exhortation to the faithful of the diocese: « *Brothers and sisters for who you shall say each day, at Mass, "... for our Bishop François...", this man who becomes your father in the faith will need you. As a human being, he seeks your friendship; as a bishop, he expects your collaboration; as your shepherd, he will seek to lovingly draw you together. Pledge him the support you gave to those who came before him. The good of your souls depends on this. Dear priests of the diocese of Edmundston, a new shepherd is in your midst, who will allow you to be yourselves shepherds to your people. The Church asks you to welcome him with respect and trust, which you have already done. You are not many, and yours is not an easy task, but the Lord is with you. "Fear not, little flock, because it has pleased your Father to give you the Kingdom." You will need your bishop: he it is who confirms your ministry as both apostolic and ecclesial. Be of one heart with his, of one voice with his, so that the faithful know that there is but one flock and one shepherd. »*

WELCOMED IN A SPIRIT OF HOPE

Bishop Dionne then told me how glad the people were to welcome me in a spirit of hope, guided by their priests and their faith: « *They are generous in collaborating and in friendship, rich in talent and imagination, full of grand designs and projects. All you will have to do is make a sign, point out a direction, and the runners will be there. »* And he added: « *The Church of Edmundston must not be measured according to the size of its population or the dimensions of its territory, but according to the faith of its members and the richness of their talents. With you, all is possible, as the angel Gabriel said to the Virgin Mary, "Nothing is impossible to God," because "His love is from age to age," as your motto says. Good luck, dear Bishop Thibodeau, and may you have much happiness in your diocese. »*

NOT NOSTALGIA, BUT GRATITUDE

It I recall these words of my predecessor, it isn't out of nostalgia but in order to reactivate in a way the great event of the episcopal ordination which has marked and continues to mark my entire life. How good it felt to hear the mayor of Edmundston welcome me so warmly, and young James Belliveau and Marie-Paul Picard, when they said, « *We are very happy that you are our captain. We have prayed for you. We love you very much.* » What affection and what goodness were showered on me, and these have not belied themselves.

GREAT ESTEEM

Speaking on behalf of the priests of the diocese, Father Alfred Ouellet had a very brotherly message: « *The grandiose celebration that draws us together is a tacit statement of the enthusiasm and the vitality of the welcome we want to extend to you. In our part of the country the bishop has always been venerated and honoured with great deference as the Elect of God and as one sent by God. We may not know of his origin, but we cannot entertain doubts regarding his competence. The Diocesan Synod study of the "Pastoral Office of Bishops," especially, has made us realise the importance as well as the requirements needed for the office of bishop. The Diocese of Edmundston is composed of a number of ethnic groups, but all are proud to gather together to welcome you; you are their bishop and shepherd, the father we need to guide us along the path of Christian living.* » And the chairman of the Diocesan Pastoral Council, Mr. Jacques Desjardins, stated: « *Be assured that all of us in the diocese want to continue to collaborate and work with you, our bishop, and that we offer our prayers so that the Holy Spirit fill you with His graces and wisdom. Thank you for having accepted to become our bishop.* » And Mrs. Ann B. Frisby said, on behalf of the anglophones, « *While we all question ourselves regarding the lack of vocations and the limited number of priests, some of us are afraid to lose their communities.* »

JANUARY 9, 1998

May this brief recollection of words spoken at my ordination be for me an incentive to pursue the mission given to me, and to you an invitation to continue to daily pray for me and collaborate with me. May this January 9, 1994 'movie' that I have just unreeled for you contribute in carrying on, on this January 9, 1998, the work of Jesus himself in living the Good News. Pray for me, so that I may continue until death to carry on the office of apostle that has been conferred on me.

+ François Thibodeau

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Bishop of Edmundston

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