
FAITHFUL TO THE END (2)



On May 31 I published a pastoral letter titled *In the Holy Spirit Let Us Live Our Mission of Love to the Limit!* Let us once again look at the example which our ancestors in the faith bequeathed us.

MOSES, JEREMIAH, AND GIDEON

Charged with freeing his brothers and sisters from the yoke of oppression, Moses quickly learned what this difficult mission required of him. Still, despite much recrimination from the people and all sorts of pressures on him, Moses maintained a steadfast courage. It was also the same with the prophet Jeremiah. Many times he entreated the Lord to release him of his mission. One of the most poignant pages in the Bible show us this inner battle of Jeremiah. « *O Lord, you have enticed me, and I was enticed; you have overpowered me, and you have prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all day long; everyone mocks me... If I say `I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,` then within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.* » (Jer. 20: 7, 9) As for Gideon the Judge, the Lord's leadership never cease to amaze him, to such a point that he must actually make an act of faith. A battle was on the verge of being waged between Gideon's 32,000 Israelites and the Midianite enemy. The Lord challenged Gideon by telling him « *The troops with you are too many... Israel would only take the credit away from me, saying, `My own hand has delivered me.` Now therefore proclaim this in the hearing of the troops, `Whoever is fearful and trembling, let him return home.` Thus Gideon sifted them out; twenty-two thousand returned, and ten thousand remained. Then the Lord said to Gideon, `The troops are still too many; take them down to the water and I will sift them out for you. .. All those who lap the water with their tongues, as a dog laps, you shall put to one side.* » (Judges 7:2-4a, 5b) The 10,000 soldiers who had knelt to drink were sent back to their own tents, leaving only 300 troops with Gideon. It was truly the Lord's might that won the battle over the Midianites, that day.

JESUS, MARY, PETER, AND PAUL

Sent by the Father to heal and save humankind, Jesus « *humbled himself and became obedient unto death, and death on a cross. Therefore God highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name.* » (Eph. 2:8-9) To be faithful to the end, Jesus gave his life freely by carrying out his Father's will to the limit. A meeting of two `Yeses` at the Annunciation, Mary's yes accepting God's offer, and Jesus' yes, welcoming the Father's will, is a constant invitation to the faithful. It was in faith that Mary accompanied her Son to Calvary, and she carries on this mission of hers down the centuries, as she continues to show her constant concern for the Church of her Son. Despite his unbelievable betrayal, once repented, Peter strengthens the faith of his brothers and sisters. (Luke 22:32) In his old age, he had to let himself be led by Another (Cf. Jn. 21:18) and he gave up his life by being crucified like his Master, but upside down. In his second letter to the Corinthians Paul the Apostle lists what it cost him, to be faithful to Jesus: « *Five times I have received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning. Three times I was shipwrecked; for a night and a day I was adrift at sea, on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from bandits, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers and sisters; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, hungry and thirsty, often without food, cold and naked.* » (2 Cor. 11:24-27) And after such an enumeration he can declare, « *I have fought the good fight,* » (1 Tim. 6:12) and « *For me, to live is Christ.* » (Phil. 1:21)

THE FIRST MISSIONARIES

If you ever have the chance to read about the sea voyage of the first missionary sisters to New France, it will be worth your while. Courageous women they were, these Augustinians and Ursulines, as they set forth in the midst of dangerous sea-faring conditions, in order to respond to the needs of their brothers and sisters, especially in the areas of health and education. Missionaries with hearts burning with Gospel zeal have no fear of giving up their lives for Jesus and his Message. John de Brébeuf, Isaac Jogues, and their companions, after having made themselves 'all things to all people,' bore final witness to their love of Jesus and their brothers and sisters by undergoing martyrdom. Whether in the Madawaska, Restigouche, or Southern Victoria regions, we, too, have had our pioneers of outstanding faith and charity. The Saint-Basile bicentennial album tells about the hardships suffered by the first white inhabitants to reach the Saint John River valley. So much misery and such dire poverty. Sister Berthe Plourde's biography of Bishop Joseph-Arthur Melanson writes about the difficulties met in colonising the Restigouche. And the same can be said about the Tobique River valley. Through poverty there arose noteworthy fidelity and solidarity.

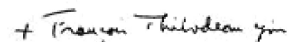
THE TIME OF FIDELITY

It would take countless pages to inform ourselves of this fidelity of our ancestors, but what is most important is to acknowledge these examples as a precious heritage and to pursue the task undertaken. The Sacred Fire, the Holy Spirit who animated them must stifle in us every shred of weakness, indifference, and weariness. The challenges of today are too great and too urgent for us not to pick them up as did our forebears in their own day. « *Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.* » (Rev. 13:10)

A WONDERFUL MISSION OF LOVE

The main thing about the February diocesan pastoral session was the common recognition that what is most urgently needed for our Church is that all the 60,000 faithful of the diocese are party to the mission of Jesus in the Madawaska, the Restigouche, and in Southern Victoria. Each of us according to our own means and capacities must proclaim the gentleness of God. Priests, religious, pastoral agents, everybody, we who are the 'faithful' of Christ Jesus all have the same mission, that of proclaiming how far has gone and still goes the love of our God. *His love is from age to age.* The person and the message of Jesus, Christ and Lord, man and God, his words and actions must still have as great a power of attraction and enticement that they had for our parents and great-grandparents. His enemies branded Jesus a 'seducer,' so great was the spiritual attraction emanating from his person. In the midst of our Western societies that can no longer hide their deficiencies and dysfunctions, their poverty and their despair, the Church must be present to all, today, not only with human warmth but also in dialogue and openness to what is being said not so much by words but by what is experienced and lived; the Church must strive to assume all of its responsibilities in bringing about a world of peace and justice.

Have a good week!



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