
“IF YOU KNEW THE GIFT OF GOD.”



On March 5 and 7, while the Sunday celebration was focusing us on the extraordinary encounter of Jesus with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, I had the pleasure of engaging in an intense pastoral visitation of the Saint-Léonard parish.

A WONDERFUL JUNCTION

A mission of St-Léonard-Parent for eight years, St-Léonard-Ville was given a parish status in 1924. Its first pastor was Father Antoine Comeau (1924-1927). He was succeeded by Fathers Armand Martin (1927-1954), Damase Thibodeau (1954-1955), Joseph-Aurèle Plourde (1955-1959), Camille Leclerc (1959-1974), Normand Godbout (1974-1984), Bertrand Ouellet (1984-1991), and Renaud Côté, C.J.M. (1991-1995). The actual pastoral team is composed of Fr. Ernest Dumaresq, C.J.M. (since August 15, 1995), Sister Réjeanne Fortin, S.G.M., and Mrs. Éméline Thériault, pastoral agents. St. Léonard is a parish of 1800 in 505 families. It owes its development mainly to the railway, the forest industry, and the customs: the INR and Bangor and Aroostook Railways used to meet up with both the C.N. and C.P. Railways which came from Québec, heading towards Saint John and Moncton. The International Bridge connects Canada with the United States, New Brunswick and Maine. The TransCanada Highway and Highway 17 to Campbellton and the Gaspé cross tracks at Saint-Léonard.

VISITS AND CELEBRATIONS

I first came in contact with the St-Léonard population back in 1991, at the time of my confrere, Father Renaud Côté, C.J.M. being appointed pastor of the parish. In the fall of 1992 I accompanied Fr. Armand Chouinard, C.J.M., as a mission team member for the Great Mission which was preached there. Since then, I have had the opportunity of visiting many institutions and places of business such as the Fernande-Bédard and Grande-Rivière Schools, the Irving Lumber Mill at Grande Rivière, and the Madawaska Weavers. In this year dedicated to the elderly I had the pleasure of celebrating Mass of the Foyer Notre-Dame, to visit the Dubé, Gervais, and Cyr Homes, and to visit the parish's Patriarch. A short visit to the Dr. Lorne J. Violette Public Library made me realise to what extent it is a most important resource to the people here. It was a grace for me to confirm 22 young people at a most lively liturgy, to visit the Grey Nuns of Montreal who are ever at work, here, and to meet the members of the parish pastoral council.

SACRAMENTAL LIFE

At the march 5 meeting I had the opportunity to share with members of the sacrament preparation committees of the Grand Falls Deanery. Once more I thank them for the work they are doing to enhance and celebrate the seven sacraments. It seems to me that these celebrations are most timely means of evangelisation, of encounters with Jesus, the Son of the living God. It is up to each and everyone of us to discover the "gift of God" and to help others discover it, too. These people who help prepare others for the reception of Baptism, Reconciliation, First Communion, Confirmation and Profession of Faith, Marriage, and Anointing of the Sick are

"revealers" of God's gift. They have no hesitation in declaring that in preparing the children to experience one or the other sacrament they themselves, the teachers, have benefited from it, as it has allowed them to deepen their understanding and experience of the divine gift.

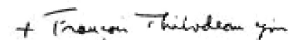
REFLECTION AND ANIMATION

Sister Denise Lamarche, C.N.D., published an excellent reflection and animation resource in 1996, titled *Les sept sacrements*, and which to my mind is most conducive to spiritual growth. She writes: *"The sacraments are a passing of the Lord in human life allowing human life to pass into God. If they are not reduced simply to the rites in which they are celebrated in the course of life, the sacraments are prime places for evangelisation. They are Good News for the Church, for the person, and for the world. In the celebration of the sacraments, people of the Church encounter God. They encounter Him to express in countless ways their acceptance of the Covenant which Jesus always initiates: 'You are my daughter, my son in Jesus Christ, and you are sent out in his name; you share in his Body and Blood; your sin is forgiven...'"*

CHURCH AS SACRAMENT

Once we realise that each sacrament is a special sign of Christ's love for each and everyone of his people, it comes as no surprise to hear that the Church herself is a sacrament of Jesus. Throughout his life on earth, faithful to the living God, Jesus brought life to the world. he was Sacrament of God on earth, and he was such because through him women and men encountered God. *"If you knew the gift of God and who it is that is saying to you 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."* [John 4:10] And he could truthfully say, *"Whoever sees me sees him who sent me."* [John 12:45] He gives to the Church in which he is until the end of time as he has promised, the mandate of continuing to repeat these words of his and to act as he did. The Church is given to the world for the world to encounter its Creator and Saviour. It is set in the midst of the world as a symbol, a junction where the Covenant between the God of mercy and humankind seeking mercy, meet. The mystery of our faith is truly great! The great sign of Church-as-Sacrament appears through all those sacraments celebrated in each of our parishes. Chrism Mass which will be celebrated in the St-Léonard Church on March 29 will remind us once again of this great gift of God.

Have a good week!



+ François Thibodeau

Bishop of Edmundston

« From A Bishop's Journal » (270) (24 March 1999)