
LET US WALK WITH JESUS



As I bring this letter to a close, I want to address in a special way three groups of people in our diocese: the young, the older people, and families. It seems to me that in the name of Jesus and at the dawn of the year 2000 I can and must call them to a very special mission.

YOUNG PEOPLE

"I confidently address myself to you who are so full of strength, daring, and enthusiasm. I was happy to confirm more than 4000 of you, these past five years. I was proud that in this way you showed me and my predecessors your desire to welcome the Holy Spirit and to be witnesses of Jesus in the world. You wanted to live the new life you have received, you wanted to become 'contaminated' with the love of God, you wanted to be bearers of the light of Jesus, and become active and responsible members of a more honest and brotherly world; in other words, you wanted to carry out the mission that Jesus gave you. How much of all this is left, today? How I wish that these beautiful dispositions of generosity, courage and availability would continue to be with you! You received the gift of wisdom so as to better understand the place of the Lord in your life. You received the gift of understanding in order to see the Word of God as a beacon guiding your path in life. You received the gift of fortitude so as to live and love as Jesus did, despite all obstacles. You welcomed the gift of counsel to help you make good decisions in your Christian life. You were given the gift of knowledge in order to discover, in the light of the Gospel, answers to life's great questions. You received the gift of filial love in order to live as true children of God. You received the gift of worship and of praise in order to pray, celebrate, and give thanks to the Lord. All of these gifts are still in you, they are vital elements: please do not neglect them!

"There is a song that we sing [in French]: *'Come, Holy Spirit, Spirit of life; come transform my heart into a fire of joy, come like a cool breeze, like a friend, come help me witness to my faith. By the beautiful gift of your Spirit, I shall be responsible for my life. If I should ever forget my commitment, Spirit of Jesus, be with me. By the wonderful gift of your Spirit, I shall be transformed like an apostle. Spirit of Jesus, abide in me.'* Isn't it a good thing to repeat this prayer, at Pentecost? Then there is also this [French] song by Robert Lebel, called *It Means*, which gave great meaning to this celebration of Confirmation: *'It means that I believe in you with all my heart; it means that I need you; it means that 'my friend, now and forever I walk with you.'* *It means: I know how much you love me and how much I mean to you, because since my baptism you really have been a marvellous friend. It means that I want to learn to live like you, by giving love to the fullest, by walking with a more and more generous heart in my everyday life. It means that I know you challenge me to fight for a more beautiful world filled with new life and a new spirit. It means that, trusting in your promise, I want to walk with you because I know that despite my weakness, you, Lord, count on me. It means that beyond the frontiers, colours, languages and thoughts, I want to spread your light and sing of the Spirit of freedom. It means that I want to serve others whether they be great or small, but most of all I want to be with the poor who are hungry and who have no friend.'* My dear young friends who have welcomed the Spirit of God, you can still walk with Jesus. You can bring to our Christian communities contagious life and strength and boldness."

THE ELDERLY

"In this International Year of Older Persons, in the name of the Church and in my own name I want to tell our elders how much our Christian communities are beholden to you for everything you have done and for all that you are today. With the whole Church I want to point out that the presence of so many elderly people in today's world is a gift and a splendid richness. You carry in you the priceless values of wisdom and self-giving; you have an invaluable

experience, your sense of history and your vision of the world help us have more solidarity with those in our milieu. The difficulties you have experienced, the jobs you have had, the suffering you have endured, and the challenges you have overcome can be an incentive to us to really live life to the fullest, this life so full of promise and challenges, too.

"In a society where efficiency is more often appreciated than kindness, you can feel put aside when it comes to decent housing, pension, social status, work, and other areas of responsibility. It is of the utmost importance that your human rights be respected and that you pursue your role of peace and justice makers in your milieu. You can continue to be very fruitful. Pope John Paul II says, *'The retirement of the elderly opens broad avenues to them for apostolic commitment.'*⁴ The Church bids you to be witnesses to the faith. You are qualified probably better than most for charitable action and apostolic endeavour and this, within liturgical life and in church associations and movements. But I believe that it is mostly to those in your family that you can carry out a very special mission by your life of prayer and your witness to hope and charity. Your way of calmly living your old age and, better still, of living life's trials like illness, suffering, and deaths of loved ones are priceless examples to your close ones and to our Christian communities. Your lively faith in the Living God opens onto a spiritual dimension that is at a premium in our time. You can communicate a sense of the divine, a hunger for God, to coming generations. Following the example of the elderly in the history of salvation, bring, like Moses, the breath of freedom to our world by being people of prayer and contemplation; be like the prophet Simeon or Anna the prophetess, people who can see the wonderful work of God today. We need you, elders of our Church, at the heart of each one of our Christian communities."

FAMILIES

"Throughout this pastoral letter I have been challenging you, because I count on you to make our Christian communities even more active and more missionary. Pope John Paul II has very often called the family the domestic Church, the Church-family. Accordingly, he states that *'in order to be a true domestic church the Christian family needs to be a setting in which parents hand down the faith, since they are for their children, by word and example, the first heralds of the faith. Families should not fail to set time aside for prayer, in which spouses are united with each other and with their children.'* And he continues: *'There is need to encourage shared spiritual moments such as participating in the Eucharist on Sundays and Holy Days, receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation, daily prayer in the family and practical signs of charity. this will strengthen fidelity in marriage and unity in families.'*ⁱⁱ Within such a family framework, children will be able to easily learn, especially through the example of their parents, that family life is a way of living one's universal call to holiness.

"There are over seventeen thousand families in our diocesan Church, an unparalleled richness. Imagine the power for renewal and even transformation that our communities can live through you, if you continue to carry out all those responsibilities which the Church gives you. I know that much is asked of you, but can we keep faith, hope, and love from growing? Can you hide the light that is in you under a bushel basket? The talents which the Lord gave you at baptism and confirmation, at your marriage and when you received other sacraments, are both for you and for others. Your mission is a demanding one, but so very great and noble. Christian parents, by the love you have for one another, by the harmony you develop in and around you, by the unity you constantly work at, you are accomplishing an indispensable task in our midst, at the heart of our communities and of all the Church. Your life witness is a precious jewel for your children and your neighbours. Your way of living, loving, praying, and forgiving speaks more than any other language. Through the sacrament of matrimony you are signs of the love of Jesus for his people."

These pressing challenges to three specific groups provoke us to respond resolutely and courageously; they do not dispense any baptised, confirmed, or ordained person from commitments made before the Church and the community. Quite the opposite. They are inseparable from the mission given by Christ to go out to the whole world, to carry the Good News of the Gospel.

+ François Thibodeau

+ François Thibodeau
Bishop of Edmundston

« From A Bishop's Journal » (289) (02 August 1999)