

---

## A FREELY-GIVEN LOVE

---



For the 21st time, the bishop of Edmundston celebrated Mass at the Foire Brayonne, the regional festival. As for me, this was the sixth time that I had the pleasure of celebrating the Lord's Day in this way. It was good to gather together to listen to the Word of God and to make eucharist. We have freely received so much from the Lord that we can really proclaim loud and clear that "his love is from age to age."

### GRATITUDE

A number of community activities are taking place in each of our deaneries: festivals, marathons, fairs, etc. I thank and congratulate all those who work for the success of all these activities and who spare no effort to bring about that success. These are occasions for fellowship, for solidarity and for a deep joy of life. Since the Lord has told us that he would be with us until the end of time, in times of happiness and at difficult moments, with you I acknowledge that he is there at the centre of our lives and our festivities, that he is very much alive among us, whether in sacred concerts and celebrations or in cultural, physical, and artistic activities. "Blessed are you, Lord. You are great and marvellous. You gave us life. Lord, you gave us a body and physical strength for us to serve you in joy; blessed are you, Lord. You gave us a body, a soul, a heart for us to help our brothers and sisters: blessed are you, Lord. May almighty God enlighten our hearts, may he be the joy of all who take part in these activities, and may he guide these activities so that we may grow in happiness of soul and common accord."

### A FESTIVE ATTITUDE

On several occasions it was said of me that I enjoy celebrations and feasts, that I am a "feaster." I take this as a beautiful compliment indicating that I have become more and more attentive to you. In every parish and family I have met people who enjoy celebrating. And it is good that it be that way. It is certainly a very important vital sign. And with you I want to be a "feaster," a lover! Our world needs such people more and more. Celebration and love are both signs of the fire burning within our hearts. Our God is a God of celebration, of feasting. It isn't for nothing that Jesus so often used illustrations from feasts, in his parables.

### GIVING FREELY

It may seem strange that still today we can talk about giving freely. A few years ago the Québec comedian Yvon Deschamps had a monologue on this theme: Is there anything at all that is free, nowadays? His list of free things in life wasn't a long one, what with having to pay for water and the high cost of enjoying the sun, in wintertime. In the song I composed for my ordination as bishop, I mention a few of these marvels and wonders: "God the Father works wonders; he gives us sky, earth, and sun, makes us stewards of the forest and the sea; this is our garden. God the Son works wonders, making himself poor among the people, as he lives with us. The Holy Spirit works wonders, changing the human heart; he brings about a new world, the first fruits of the Kingdom."

### THE GIFT OF LIFE

I hope that these festive days, these days of fellowship, this vacation time make us discover something of God's free gifts. Is there a gift more precious than life itself? It is the Lord himself who gives us his breath of life so that we may enjoy the pleasures of life. For several weeks now people of the diocese have been pointing out to me what the Lord has done and continues to do for me. "Filled with the Lord's blessings, we proclaim to the world that his love is from age to age."

### **THE GIFT OF THE SACRAMENTS**

Then there are those precious gifts we call sacraments. The sacrament of baptism which makes us share in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and makes us members of his Church. Then there are the beautiful sacraments of confirmation, the Eucharist, and reconciliation; and the sacraments of marriage, anointing of the sick, and holy orders. What free gifts are contained in each of these sacraments that allow us to share in the very life of the Risen One, in the life of the Holy Spirit and of the Church, of this beloved diocesan Church of ours!

### **THE GIFT OF THE WORD**

Then there is the Word of God which contains all the promises of eternal life. A sure, effective, and living Word! A word which reaches us today, which calls us together and which nourishes and enlightens us. A word of comfort, since it is the Word of God, the Word made flesh. On numerous occasions God spoke to His people; he spoke through the prophets and the leaders like Abraham, Isaac, Moses, and David. But in these end times it is through Jesus, the Son of the Living God, the Word made flesh, that God has spoken.

### **THE GIFT OF FELLOWSHIP**

Finally, there are these free bonds which unite us to one another: family ties, couple relationships, friendship ties, community ties. And aren't the summer festivals a distinct opportunity for us to experience what it is that unites us in friendship, fellowship, freedom, and truth? All of these bonds which we fashion among our families, villages, towns, cities and country; all of these bonds which are freely created: can they not be occasions for us to be grateful once again for our social, cultural, economic and political growth, and to proclaim once more: "Filled with the Lord's blessings, we proclaim to the world that his love is from age to age"?

### **OUR OFFERINGS**

There would be no end to listing all that the Lord freely offers. Even the offerings we ourselves bring to our celebrations are gifts of God which we offer back to Him - since all is from Him, through Him, and in Him. And this is done for the glory of God and the salvation of the world. Let us continue to be people of celebration, of thankfulness, and of gratitude.

*+ François Thibodeau*

+ François Thibodeau  
Bishop of Edmundston

« From A Bishop's Journal » (291) (11 August 1999)