
A MESSAGE TO THE ELDERLY



Towards the end of my pastoral letter this year I especially addressed three groups of people in our diocese: youth, the elderly, and families. It appears to me that as the year 2000 draws near, I can and must hand them a very special mission in the name of Jesus. Today in a very special way I write to the elderly. I am glad that during the year different activities have taken place throughout the diocese, such as the "Friendship Games" that took place in Edmundston in June; and the July 11 Saint-François country fair. I also recall the presence of the Edmundston and Upper Madawaska Golden Age Clubs at the Mass held at the "Foire Brayonne." I am pleased to note that almost everywhere during Golden Age Week, many tributes were given and much gratitude and affection were shown to our elders.

A THOUSAND THANKS!

During this year dedicated to the elderly I want to tell them, on behalf of the diocese and in my own name, how each one of our Christian communities is grateful to you for all you have accomplished and all that you are today. Along with the entire Church I acknowledge that the presence of so many elderly in our midst is a gift and a richness. You carry in yourselves the priceless values of wisdom and generosity, and your experience surpasses all of ours. Your sense of history and your vision of the world can even today strengthen our solidarity with those around us. The trials which have been yours, the positions you have held, the suffering you have endured, the challenges you have taken up are a powerful motivation to our living fully each and every day which is full of promise along with difficulties.

NEW SPACES

In a society which has banked its all on efficiency and very seldom on gratuitousness, you elders can often feel marginalized when it comes to housing, pension benefits, social status, work opportunity, and other areas of responsibility. It is supremely important that your human rights be respected and that you be allowed to be peace and justice makers in your milieus. You can continue to bear much fruit. Pope John Paul II has stated "the retirement of the elderly opens wide the doors to apostolic works."

WITNESSES OF THE FAITH

The Church invites you to be witnesses to the faith. You are empowered, oftentimes more than anyone else, to be involved in charitable acts and in the apostolate, in the liturgy, and in church associations and movements. Yet I believe that it is mostly to the members of your families that you can exercise a very special ministry of prayer and witness to hope and charity. The way you live your advancing years in serenity and the trials of life with its illnesses, its suffering and its mourning are significant examples to family and friends in the Christian community. Your lively faith in the Living God opens you to a rare spiritual dimension, nowadays. You can pass on this sense of the holy and yearning for God to coming generations.

PEOPLE OF PRAYER

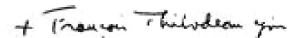
Following the example of the elderly throughout our faith history, be examples like Moses, bringing about a breath of freedom to our world by being people of prayer and contemplation. Be like the prophet Simeon or the prophetess Anna, acknowledging God's wonderful deeds today. We need you elders in our Church today, at the heart of each of our Christian communities.

"I WANT TO SAY THANK YOU"

The "Amis de la prière" (Friends of Prayer: 805 Raymond, Saint-Hyacinthe Qc, J2S 5T9) recently published a prayer entitled *I Want to Say Thank You*. Here it is: *Lord, in the evening of my life I want to thank You again. I thank you for your goodness without measure, for your kindness, for your unsurpassing love. I thank you for having given me your strength and support in times of trial and suffering. Your daily reassuring presence has taught me to hope and never forget You. Life is the greatest of everything that exists and I freely acknowledge that it comes from You. It is from You only that I receive it, and I hold it in the palm of my hand while it is softly ebbing away. I raise up my hands like a cup to offer You this life of mine, this life You have given me, I offer it to You with everything good and not so good that it has, with its acts of generosity, and its times of weakness and disappointment. I thank You especially for the peace and friendship You share with me. Thank You also for the joyous hope of seeing You one day when your love and mine will be one in this new life without end. Lord, I joyfully greet each new day You give me. I accept in advance what your love will place in it of happiness, despite the suffering that comes with it. And when the final day is here, when You say, "Come, I am waiting," I shall confidently say good-bye to all and leave for home with You and the great eternal banquet.*

STATISTICS

According to the United Nations' Department of Economic and Social Affairs, there are today 66 million people aged 80 years and older; there will be 370 million of them by the year 2050, of whom 2 million 200 thousand will be over 100. If this trend holds for our region, we too shall have several centenarians in our midst!



+ François Thibodeau
Bishop of Edmundston

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