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## ALREADY SIX YEARS!

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It shall be six years on Sunday that I was ordained bishop. On January 9, 1994 at the Immaculate Conception Cathedral in Edmundston, my beloved predecessor Bishop Gérard Dionne gave me this great sacrament in the presence of numerous bishops and priests and a multitude of the faithful who came despite the memorable storm. Now I would like to reminisce a bit with you on this grace-filled event.

### APOSTOLIC LETTER

Allow me to read over with you the letter which Pope John Paul II wrote to me on October 20, 1993, to tell me of my appointment and give me a mission:

*John Paul, bishop, servant of the servants of God, to Our beloved son François Thibodeau of the Congregation of Jesus and Mary, bishop-elect of the Edmundston See, greetings and Apostolic Blessing!*

*It is one of Our special duties to take the best decisions to ensure the greatest spiritual welfare of all the faithful.*

*Since our Venerable brother Gérard Dionne will shortly be retiring as bishop of Edmundston, We have deemed it prudent to appoint another Shepherd to lead this Community competently.*

*Our thoughts were then directed toward you, our beloved son who, because of your well-known pastoral qualities, appear to be the one to continue as the new bishop of this diocese.*

*That is why, following the considered opinion of the Congregation of Bishops, and prevailing Ourselves of Our apostolic authority, We choose you as bishop and shepherd of Edmundston, with the rights and obligations inherent to your function and role, according to the Canon Law which applies.*

*Before receiving episcopal consecration in the presence of the assembled faithful you must make your profession of faith and take the oath of fidelity to Us and Our successors, according to established norms, signed by you and sealed, which you are to forward to the Congregation of Bishops.*

*You shall advise clergy and faithful of your election. We instantly exhort them to religious fervour and the observance of religion.*

*We do not ignore, dear son, and We judge that the mission We are giving you is important. Hence you must always keep your eyes fixed on the Gospel precepts and the other beneficial obligations which indicate your love of the Saviour, so as to more and more resemble him.*

## **MORE THAN A COINCIDENCE!**

It is not every day that one gets a letter like this. It was addressed to me on the day the Eudist family celebrated the Mass of the Heart of Jesus, composed by Saint John Eudes; this was not only a coincidence but a call to live from this Love of the Heart of Jesus, and to make him known. The Pope himself called on me to keep my eyes on the Gospel precepts, to show love for the Saviour, and to resemble him more and more. What a programme!

## **A BOLD PRAYER**

Among the prayers made that day, the prayer of consecration was especially noteworthy: *"God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Father of mercies and God of all consolation, you dwell in heaven, yet look with compassion on all that is humble. You know all things before they come to be; by your gracious word you have established the plan of your Church. From the beginning you chose the descendants of Abraham to be your holy nation. You established rulers and priests, and did not leave your sanctuary without ministers to serve you. From the creation of the world you have been pleased to be glorified by those whom you have chosen. So now pour out upon this chosen one that power which is from you, the governing Spirit whom you gave to your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, the Spirit given by him to the holy apostles, who founded the Church in every place to be our temple for the unceasing glory and praise of your name."* [The Rites of the Catholic Church... Volume Two. New York: Pueblo Publishing Co., 1980, p. 95]

## **CONSTANT SERVICE**

The bishop then continues this bold prayer: *"Father, you know all hearts. You have chosen your servant for the office of bishop. May he be a shepherd to your holy flock, and a high priest blameless in your sight, ministering to you night and day; may he always gain the blessing of your favor and offer the gifts of your holy Church. Through the Spirit who gives the grace of high priesthood grant him the power to forgive sins as you commanded, to assign ministries as you have decreed, and to loose every bond by the authority which you gave to your apostles. May he be pleasing to you by his gentleness and purity of heart, presenting a fragrant offering to you [...]"* [Ibid., p. 95-96]

## **EPISCOPAL INSIGNIA**

At the conclusion of the ordination, Bishop Dionne signed me with holy chrism and gave me the book of the Gospel for me to proclaim it without cease. In giving me the bishop's ring he said: *"Take this ring, the seal of your fidelity. With faith and love protect the bride of God, his holy Church."* [Ibid.] And in placing the miter on my head, he said: *"Receive the miter; may the light of holiness shine bright in you so you may receive the imperishable crown of glory when the Chief Shepherd appears."* And in giving me the pastoral staff, Bishop Dionne said, *"Take this staff as a sign of your pastoral office: keep watch over the whole flock in which the Holy Spirit has appointed you to shepherd the Church of God."* [Ibid.]

Thanking you for all your good wishes and prayers, I ask you to continue praying for me in the days and years to come. Have a good week!

+ François Thibodeau

+ François Thibodeau  
Bishop of Edmundston

« From A Bishop's Journal » (312) (05 January 2000)