
DO NOT BE AFRAID TO WITNESS TO YOUR FAITH



On June 24 I had the pleasure of presiding the Graduation Mass of the A.-M. Sormany Regional High School. Together we celebrated the feast of Saint John the Baptist, a matchless herald, a prophet of justice and sharing, a privileged witness of Christ Jesus. Just like the Class of 2000 who are a bridge connecting two millennia, John the Baptist is a bridge spanning two ages, those of the Old and the New Testaments. What follows are excerpts from the homily I gave at this Mass.

AN AWFUL BETRAYAL

On June 1 I published a communique regarding religious education and pastoral ministry in the [French] school system, at which time I received some very distressing messages. One of them pointed out the serious responsibility of these adults who are trying to do away with our children's spiritual development: "It is an awful betrayal which will have serious consequences in the lives of both the young people and society." Another message was a reminder of Jesus' very own reaction, as applied to those parents and teachers who are abdicating their responsibility: "Everyone who acknowledges me before others, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others will be denied before my Father in heaven" (Luke 12:8-9). Yet another message accused us of abdicating our responsibilities regarding the religious training of our youth because we fear eventual controversy from individuals and minority groups.

AN OUTSTANDING WITNESS

Mine is not to judge the intentions of constituted authority, but as bishop I must remind one and all of the witness of John the Baptist who fearlessly informed the authorities of his day of the great values of justice and truth, of solidarity and sharing, and who without fear called one and all to repentance and conversion. "*The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight'*" (Matthew 3:3). In his inaugural address, October 22, 1978, Pope John Paul II gave a mission to all the baptised, to the whole world, in fact. Even if this year's graduates were not there in 1978, I am certain that sooner or later someone spoke the words to them, famous, powerful words.

"DO NOT BE AFRAID!"

"Brothers and sisters, do not be afraid to welcome Christ and to accept his power. Do not be afraid! Open wide the doors to Christ! To his saving power open the borders of countries, political and economic systems, the enormous field of culture, civilisation, and development. Do not be afraid! Christ knows what is inside the human being and he alone knows! Today, humankind so often ignores what it bears within itself, in the depths of its spirit and its heart. So very often is humankind uncertain of the reason for being on earth, Humankind is assailed by doubt which deteriorates into despair. So please allow me, I humbly and confidently implore you, allow Christ to speak to man and woman. He alone has the words of life, yes, the words of everlasting life."

UNDER THE SIGN OF EXCELLENCE

Dear graduates, you who have completed your studies under the mark of excellence, I find pleasure in repeating to you, "Open the doors to the Lord Jesus Christ; do not be afraid, open wide the doors, open them!" Like John the Baptist you have to prepare, you have to make ready the way of the Lord. The great challenge given to you as you reach the end of your course of studies is to respond to the mission which comes from your baptism. You are responsible for what you have learned. Help yourselves to pursue your research and reflection through an ongoing formation of your faith as you deepen the quality of your personal and community prayer and your commitment to your families, your work, and the new social, economic, cultural and political realities you will be faced with.

PRIDE, DARING, EAGERNESS

It is with confidence that I address myself to you who are so full of energy, daring, and eagerness. You were given a very special power, one which fills your whole being. When you prepared for confirmation you were proud to state that you wanted to welcome the Holy Spirit in you in order to better witness to Jesus in the world. You wanted to grow and develop in the new life you had received, you wanted to be "contagious" with the love of God; you wanted to bear the light of Jesus to make it shine; you wanted to be active and responsible people in bringing about a more just and kinder world; you wanted to carry out the mission which Jesus gave you. So, what happened to all of this? How I hope that all these beautiful dispositions you had to generosity, courage, and availability, continue to stir you up!

EVER-PRESENT GIFTS

At your confirmation you welcomed the gift of wisdom to enable you to make more room in your life for the Lord. How is it today? You received the gift of understanding so that you could grasp the Word of God as a light unto your feet. You received the gift of strength to help you live in love, like Jesus, despite the obstacles in your way. You received the gift of counsel which enables you to make good decisions in your Christian life. You received the gift of knowledge so that in the light of the Gospels you be able to find answers to life's great questions. You received the gift of filial love to help you live truly as children of God. You were given the gift of worship and praise for you to pray to the Lord, to celebrate, and give him thanks. All of these gifts are still in you, they are very important spiritual energies. Do not ever neglect them!

+ François Thibodeau

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Bishop of Edmundston

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