
"LET THE SPIRIT BURST FORTH!" (3)



Following is a third excerpt from my pastoral letter of June 11; it is meant as an act of thanksgiving for the wonders worked by the Spirit in our midst.

TIES TO MAINTAIN

In the fall of 1999 I visited Rome where I met the Holy Father and the heads of the Roman congregations. I also attended a number of meetings: the annual meeting of Canadian bishops, the Atlantic bishops' meeting, meeting of major superiors of religious congregations working in the Atlantic provinces, etc. Just as a parish cannot close in on itself and must open to the deanery and the diocese, in the same way our diocesan Church must be open to the other Churches in our country as well as to the universal Church. It is a great privilege to live the "communion of saints" in this manner: the bishop is the sign of this unity willed by the Lord.

JUBILEE 2000

It was in November, 1994, that Pope John Paul II launched a preparatory programme to the Jubilee Year 2000, a very detailed plan to help us over the threshold into the third millennium. The biblical tradition of the jubilee gave us the main outline of the celebration. The deeds of Jesus of Nazareth as recorded by Luke the Evangelist repeated the message of liberation. As a sign of solidarity with the other Churches in Canada I expressed these traditions in a simple song where I sought to bring out the sense of commitment: ["Sound the Trumpet! Beam with Joy! This Is the Great Jubilee!" *From A Bishop's Journal*, 310, December 22, 1999]

Sound the trumpet! Beam with joy! Free the captives! Forgive debts!
Respect the earth! This is the Great Jubilee!

"I have freed you," says the Lord. "In return, free your neighbour,
And you will change the world!" *Lord, make me a channel of your peace!*

"I have forgiven you," says the Lord. "In return, release those indebted to you,
And you will change the world!" *Lord, make me a channel of your joy!*

"I have satisfied your hunger," says the Lord. "In return, give rest to the earth,
And you will change the world!" *Lord, make me a channel of your hope!*

"From age to age you shall celebrate the Lord's sacred Jubilee," says the Lord,
"And you will change the world!" *Lord, make me a channel of your love!*

"The Spirit is upon me," says the Lord. "Scripture is being fulfilled in your presence,"
And we will change the world! *Lord, make me a channel of your kindness!*

COMPASSION

I want to pay tribute to those who through food bank drives and Christmas Cheer donations helped in any way to alleviate the misery existing both here and in the Third World, by working to rid the world of poverty and injustice, through Development and Peace and the Year 2000 World March of Women.

EUCCHARISTIC CONGRESSES

For us who had decided in the spring of 1995 to hold five Eucharistic congresses in preparation for the great Jubilee, these proved to be exceptional times of evangelisation and of remarkable activities of solidarity and fellowship. So much thanks must be given to our God who has worked so many marvels among us! The Holy Spirit worked marvels in the Restigouche, Southern Victoria, Upper Madawaska, Grand Falls, and Edmundston deaneries. We do not regret having chosen these Eucharistic congresses as the major preliminary activities to the year 2000; these Eucharistic congresses helped us ponder all that the Lord Jesus said and did. We saw how mission is rooted in the Eucharist and we experienced the intimate connection between family, Sunday, and Eucharist, and we realised how the Eucharist builds up Christian community. What a happy coincidence it is to bring our Fifth Diocesan Eucharistic Congress to a close on this feast of Pentecost, truly one of the most memorable days of our jubilee year.

SUMMARY REPORT OF CONGRESSES

The five Eucharistic congresses highlighted certain aspects of the great sacrament of the Eucharist. At the first Congress, in the Restigouche in 1996, we recalled the words and actions of Jesus. "*Do this in memory of me.*" These words motivate us to continue the wonderful work of Jesus. Each time we celebrate the Eucharist we keep the commandment of the Lord who gave up his body and blood for us. We recall the death of Jesus, his glorious resurrection, his coming again in glory; He gave his life so that we in turn would give ours for the sake of others, by loving one another as he has loved us. In the Southern Victoria Deanery in 1997 we considered how the Eucharist is at the heart of our mission, not only the mission of pastors but of the whole People of God. From celebration to celebration, the People of God proceeds to the heavenly banquet when all the elect will sit at the same table in the Kingdom.

EUCCHARIST, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITIES

In the Upper Madawaska Deanery in 1998, the Eucharistic Congress highlighted the bond which exists between family and Eucharist. Our Sunday gatherings are extremely important not only to the community but also to every faithful, as important as any gathering around the family meal. Just as it is necessary for members of the same family to take time together, to meet together, to talk and communicate with one another and share together around the family table, it is just as important for us to meet, share, pray, and celebrate together as Church. Sundays celebrated in dignity are necessary to every baptised person, as they are, also, to every community. In 1999, in the Grand Falls Deanery, we emphasised the Eucharist as community builder. Each Eucharistic celebration helps build up and form the community; this is not always achieved in a spectacular way, but week by week the Christian community discovers the One who gathers together, it discovers the One who liberates, the One who nourishes. Our churches are not museums dedicated to yesteryear, they are sanctuaries of life and solidarity where the faithful come to restore their strength both as individuals and as members of the same community.

THE CHURCH IS RENEWED

The year 2000 congress, which will be held in the Edmundston Deanery, will motivate us to constant renewal as Church. Nourished by the Eucharist, we welcome Jesus in the midst of our lives, Jesus, true God and true man, the pre-eminent sign of God the Father. It would be impossible for us to do Eucharist without the constant presence of the Holy Spirit. He is the one Jesus sent us, he is the one who reminds us of the words and actions of Jesus, he is the one who transforms the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, he is the one who transforms each baptised and confirmed person into a witness of God's wonderful deeds. It is this same Spirit who gives life to the Church and enhances its beauty, making it more holy, perfect, charitable, and loving. He is the one who sends us forth along the mission road. For these five Eucharistic congresses to become a living heritage, we must discover day after day who is the Body of Christ. Have a good week!

+ François Thibodeau

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Bishop of Edmundston

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