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## GOOD POPE JOHN

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The beatification September 3 of this year of Pope John XXIII whom everyone called “Good Pope John,” is an important event of the Jubilee Year 2000; through this gesture the Church reminds us that we are all called to holiness of life.

### MY PREDECESSORS

My predecessors as bishops of Edmundston could better than I recall the sympathetic figure of the new Blessed John XXIII. Bishop J.-Roméo Gagnon was privileged to live with Pope John the first session of Vatican Council II. In his book, *Petite histoire*, Bishop Gerard Dionne recalls his first audience with him as one of his dreams come true: “*The Pope was popular and loved; it was easy to notice the favour he was doing us by taking the time to greet us.*” And I can affirm that Bishop Fernand Lacroix also was marked by Pope John XXIII’s kindness. I remember that at the opening of the Council on October 11, 1963 Father Fernand Lacroix, then superior of our seminary at Limbourg, presided a solemn midnight mass. We were all moved as we listened to the telecasts coming to us from Rome. The television programme *À l’heure du Concile* was a major weekly event.

### TIES WITH CANADA

During his five years on the chair of St. Peter, John XXIII appointed one Canadian archbishop and thirteen bishops; he also erected the Hull into a diocese. Very much interested by what was happening in Latin America, he called on the Canadian churches to come to the aid of this continent in distress; this led to many dioceses sending priests, sisters, brothers, and lay people to other sister-Churches. Shortly before his death, John XXIII addressed a letter to the Canadian bishops to thank them for the aid given and urge them to continue their support. He asserted that there was not one diocese in Canada that could not immediately send one or two priests to Latin America. It was in response to this that in 1967 Father Gerard Dionne became director of the Canadian Catholic Office for Latin America, in Ottawa. At the Synod of Bishops for the Americas, the Canadian bishops presented an impressive balance sheet of these inter-Church exchanges. At a time when we are welcoming into our midst a priest from Boma, Republic of the Congo, we too can experience this same spirit of partnership with other Churches.

### DECREES OF BEATIFICATION

The beatification process is relatively long. As soon as Pope Paul VI announced, on November 18, 1965, his intention of proceeding with the beatification process of his predecessor, a thorough investigation was made of the life of Pope John. A final document several hundred pages long was summarised in two decrees, the first on the pope’s spirit of charity and the other on miracles justifying the beatification. Pope John had written, in his *Journal*, “*Faith, hope and love are the three stars of episcopal grandeur*”. He placed his hope in the Lord, he trusted in the power of prayer, and he longed for what was eternal. Like the Good Samaritan he hastened to care for humans in order to bind the wounds caused by faults, injustice, and discord. He condemned error and defended the truth; he advanced the cause of peace, but without harshness or vehemence. His arms were always wide open to welcome those children of God who needed support.

## A PRECIOUS LEGACY

The magazine *Fêtes et Saisons* published an excellent document on “*Blessed John XXIII*,” on his humble and modest beginnings, on his years as a priest, diplomat, bishop, nuncio, patriarch, and pope. Henri Denis, an expert on the Council, states the following: “[Could we have drawn] a *balance sheet of the Pope’s action during the Council? As far as the Council itself was concerned his main intervention was... not to intervene, or rather to intervene in such a way as to leave the Council fathers as much freedom as possible. From king of kings that his predecessor had been, John XXIII was a brother bishop. He made these bishops from all over the world take notice of the awesome burden of being responsible for the Church. He pointed out that the Church’s behaviour has implications well beyond the Catholic world: non-Catholics, even non-Christians attended the debates so that the world could follow step-by-step the progress of the aggiornamento.*”

## “THE CHURCH REJOICES”

It is good to read over again the opening address of the Council, along with the encyclical *Pacem in terris*, his spiritual testament. The world is not evil in itself and we must make an end of this despicable hatred of the world. “*In the daily exercise of our pastoral ministry we often hear insinuations from people who are certainly well-intentioned and zealous, but who lack open-mindedness, discretion, and balance. In modern times these people see only deceit and ruin. They will tell you that our world has much deteriorated compared to olden days; they behave as if they had learned nothing from history which, after all, is the mistress of life, and as if in the days of former ecumenical councils Christian thinking and living had triumphed, as well as religious freedom. It seems to us truly necessary to voice unequivocally our disagreement with these prophets of doom who forever predict catastrophes and the quasi-imminent end of the world... In the present state of things, Providence leads us towards a new order of human relationships which, through man’s labour and often beyond his expectations, is directed towards his supreme and unexpected desires, and all things, even human diversity, cooperate to the greater good of the Church.*”

“Blessed John XXIII, pray for us, for the Church, and for all humankind.”



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