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## PATRON FEAST OF THE DIOCESE

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December 8 is the patron feast of our diocese. On this special occasion, may we be united with one another. I know that several church leaders in the diocese are celebrating this feast with some solemnity. I myself shall be celebrating Mass in Rome for the intentions of everyone in the diocese, living and deceased. Each in our own way, let us give thanks together.

### THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION IN HISTORY

The cathedral parish was originally called Notre-Dame-du-Petit-Sault [Our Lady of Little Falls]. Its first pastor, Father Louis-Côme D'Amours, readily changed its name to "Immaculate Conception." The English and Norman Middle Ages were already celebrating a feast of the conception of Mary back in the XI<sup>th</sup> century, a celebration of the event itself with greater stress on its miraculous condition. Saint Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury at the beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> century taught and propounded the greatness of the mystery effected in Mary's conception. In 1432, the Council of Basle in Switzerland considered this mystery a matter of faith. However, it was not until December 8, 1854 that the infallible definition of Pope Pius IX made the Immaculate Conception an article of Catholic faith. The Pope's declaration affirms that at no time of her life was Mary subject to the domination of sin and that in anticipation of Christ's redemption she was preserved from the stain of original sin from the first moment of her conception. When Mary appeared at Lourdes as the "Immaculate Conception" to a child named Bernadette Soubirous who had never heard such an expression, she corroborated the dogma's definition of 1854. Ever since, Lourdes has remained a place of prayer and conversion where God's action is often manifested by healing graces which medical science cannot explain. Devotion to the Immaculate Conception has spread throughout the world.

### IN OUR MILIEU

If the parish of Edmundston, erected in 1880, bears the name of the Immaculate Conception, another parish erected in 1914 bears a similar name: Notre-Dame-de-Lourdes [Our Lady of Lourdes]. At the diocese's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary I recalled the August 14, 1945 address of the Apostolic Delegate at the episcopal ordination of the first bishop of the diocese, Marie-Antoine Roy, O.F.M.: *"Your ancestors built this country with tears and sweat, but ever under the protection of the Virgin, the bright, shining star of their lives. Mary guided, supported, encouraged and strengthened them throughout their long earthly pilgrimage, during the dark days which only bound them closer to their country. A people as devoted to Mary as these were does not die off, cannot die off. In Mary's love it remains faithful to God and His Church, and under the Virgin's protection it is restored again along the path of its progress and true glory."*

### THE FIRST BISHOP'S PETITION

It is not surprising that in such a context -- since Pope Pius XII had designated the parish church of the Immaculate Conception the cathedral of the new diocese of Edmundston -- Bishop Marie-Antoine Roy solicited from the Holy See the favour of designating the Most Blessed Virgin under her title of Immaculate Conception as patron of the diocese in order to officially place all the parishes under her protection, in the hope of obtaining more abundant graces through her mediation. On June 13, 1947, a decree of the Holy See was

signed to this effect. Here are excerpts: *“The most faithful Catholics of the diocese of Edmundston hold in high veneration the sublime holiness of the Immaculate Virgin Mother of God, her dignity and privilege of exemption from the stain of sin. That is why, in order to increase their devotion towards the Immaculate Blessed Virgin Mary, especially for the preservation of the purity of their youth, the bishop has petitioned for and been granted so great a favour. His Holiness has declared the Immaculate Conception as principal patron of the Diocese of Edmundston.”* It was therefore with the entire population in mind but with the youth in particular that the first bishop chose the Immaculate Conception. As the Immaculate Virgin is in complete harmony with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, [Bishop Roy’s] desire was that all of us be likewise. This purity of heart [of Mary] is anchored in the beatitudes proclaimed by Jesus: a singleness of heart and mind, in complete harmony with the Will of God.

#### **REDISCOVERING MARY’S MISSION**

I for my part heartily hope that we may rediscover Mary’s vocation and mission at the heart of our Church. In a diocese of which she is the principal patron and which has words from her prayer as its motto: *His Love Is from Age to Age*, in a diocese where eleven of its parishes are dedicated to the Virgin Mary, I heartily hope that Mary be for us the model of an extraordinary woman of faith, attentive to the Word of God and the Will of God, concerned for the needs of her brothers and sisters. Mary is Mother of Jesus, Mother of God, disciple of Jesus, Mother of the Church, our sweet mother, our companion on the way. May she help us give thanks to God for all the wonders He has worked among us; may she fill our hearts with gratitude and availability, with a loving and merciful heart, a heart in perfect harmony with the heart of God, a heart which is up to the challenges of the day, a heart which knows how to present Jesus today. I ask her all this for the entire Church of Edmundston. May we, after Mary’s example and through her intermediary, be among those who welcome, announce and proclaim day after day the Good News of Jesus that *“His love Is from Age to Age.”*

*+ François Thibodeau*

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Bishop of Edmundston

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