
MAY THE YEAR 2001 BE GOOD TO YOU!



As we reach the threshold to the year 2001 I first want to thank the Lord with you for everything we have experienced during the Jubilee of the year 2000. Inaugurated amidst some nervousness caused by everything coming to us from the four corners of the planet, still we avoided every bug and all semblance to the end of the world, so that we could begin the new year in peace and hope. For my part, it was in prayer at the Cathedral in Edmundston, that the new year 2000 started with a midnight Mass. "My God, bless the new year: bring happiness to family and friends. The year is ours, it is given to us to deserve paradise."

JUBILEE YEAR

I was able on a number of occasions to explain the meaning of jubilee; I went on pilgrimage to each of the 32 parishes according to the characteristics of a jubilee year. According to Jewish tradition, because of their faith in the living God, in the jubilee year the Chosen People had to free their slaves, cancel debts and give the earth the chance of starting afresh. These were most important and demanding social measures to allow the world to start anew in life. Such measures can still inspire us today to respect every single human being and free all people from oppression and physical or psychological barriers, to liberate all people from certain debts which do not allow one to live and develop. We can see the timeliness of this when we look at the extraordinary success in getting an immense number of fellow citizens to sign petitions for the lessening or outright cancelling of the debts of poor countries. Each signature represented about two thousand dollars, if we look at the amount which rich countries have redistributed to countries struggling under the debt load.

JESUS YESTERDAY, TODAY, AND FOREVER

First and foremost, the year 2000 marked for all Christians the anniversary of Christ Jesus' coming into the world 2000 years ago. We can read, "2000 years of Good News" on banners hung in the cathedral, the Diocesan Centre, and several churches; two thousand years ago the Word became Emmanuel and dwelt among us. At the invitation of Pope John Paul II we opened the doors of our hearts to Christ Jesus. Just as Pope John Paul opened the Holy Door of the Roman basilicas, especially those of St. Peter and the Lateran, so too did we open our churches in an altogether special way: each parish, besides the cathedral, the Diocesan Centre, the Hôtel-Dieu of St. Joseph [St. Basile], and the Convent of the Blessed Sacrament Sisters, was designated a pilgrimage church where one could receive the grace of the Jubilee. All Christians were invited to go on pilgrimage to these churches as a sign of their receiving our Saviour in their hearts, in a spirit of conversion, communion, and solidarity. I want to thank and congratulate those in charge of our parishes who held special activities to highlight the Jubilee year. I attended several of these activities, especially in Southern Victoria where the Christian communities of Maliseet, St. Patrick and Aroostook gathered together in St. Mary of the Angels church to demonstrate through their three cultures - Maliseet, English, and French - how Jesus was all things to all people. Days of recollection and retreats were also held in the framework of jubilee celebrations.

EUCCHARISTIC CONGRESSES

At the diocesan level we had decided in 1995 that our major activity would be the preparation and celebration of five Eucharistic congresses. We did not go wrong, in this; even if these activities demanded a lot of the deaneries, we are justly proud of their effects. We shall long remember all that took place in the Restigouche,

Southern Victoria, the Upper Madawaska, the Grand Falls and the Edmundston deaneries. Those who watched on community T.V. were full of praise for the two telecast celebrations, the Congress's opening Mass from the Church of Notre-Dame-des-Sept-Douleurs and that of the Anointing of the Sick from the diocesan shrine of Ste-Anne-de-Madawaska. On January 7, 2001, we shall have the opportunity to conclude our Jubilee celebrations with a celebration of the Word and a religious concert by people from throughout our five pastoral deaneries.

DAY-TO-DAY ACTIVITIES

I want to thank the Lord with you for everything that was experienced daily at the heart of our families: joys, activities and celebrations have often been daily occurrences. I can I not rejoice at the birth of the approximately 600 babies, in our milieus, of the baptisms celebrated, of the 675 confirmations and 225 marriages which took place? These were high points in the lives of individuals and families: moments of grace and love, times of celebration and of friendship. Over 600 funerals were held throughout the diocese of Edmundston; I want to share in the sorrow experienced by my brothers and sisters, but I share even more their steadfast faith in the Resurrection. In these final days of the year, a recollection of their memories can sometimes bring back tears of grief and pain, but we are convinced that when life is ended on earth "they already have an everlasting home in heaven". When I consider all the grandparents and parents who have left us I also think of all the young people who are no longer with us. On this note I cannot forget Father Lewis Long who died March 24, and Father Claude Martin, C.J.M., who died in August.

RISING TO THE CHALLENGES

This overview of the year 2000 would be incomplete if I failed to mention the promising results of our main priorities, the establishment of parish pastoral teams and of home- and parish-based religious education. As we searched together for the best means of carrying out our mission, it appeared to us that our local Christian communities can no longer rest on one person alone, but in keeping with new Church legislation, we could establish these pastoral teams. Thanks to God and to the efforts of many priests and several volunteers, we now have fourteen parish pastoral teams to serve our thirty-two parishes. At the same time, we have had to respond to the challenge of home-based religious education. In this latter endeavour also it was wonderful to realise the number of parents and grandparents who picked up this new challenge. In very little time programmes were organised and set in motion as parents and children discovered the life of faith together and together encountered the very person of Jesus. For all these blessings we are grateful. "Lord, source of life, we thank you for the love you placed in our hearts. Keep us in your joy and peace, and may we grow in happiness and health. May the same love unite us all!"

A happy New Year to one and all! I bless you with all my heart!

+ François Thibodeau

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