
EDMUNDSTON CATHEDRAL BEAUTIFUL CATHEDRAL, HOLY CATHEDRAL



From my very first day with you I was struck by the beauty of the Edmundston cathedral, so much so that I petitioned Rome to have it elevated to the rank of a basilica, only to be told that there was a moratorium on this, that this appellation is now restricted. However, I was kindly reminded that the title of “cathedral” conferred on a church was superior to any other title.

WHERE DOES THE WORD “CATHEDRAL” COME FROM?

The word “cathedral” comes from the Greek “cathedra”, a seat, a bishop’s seat, but not only the seat but also the altar, the presbyterium, and the people of God over which the bishop is shepherd. It is the place where the bishop usually teaches the people of God, where he presides the celebration of sacraments, especially the Eucharist; it is the place where he convenes his presbyterium, and where he gathers his people. The cathedral is the pre-eminent sign of the unity of Christians united to their bishop in one faith, one hope, one charity. In other words, we quickly pass from the symbol expressed to the reality experienced. We can find similarities to this in civic life. In every province there is a “legislative” assembly and at the centre of the assembly is the “seat” of the lieutenant-governor – or the governor general, in the House of Commons. It is good to remember that the word “church” means “gathering”, “assembly”, and that these places are specific to a particular mission or task. The legislative assembly is a place to listen to the people and legislate on their behalf. The cathedral is there to welcome Christians and to celebrate with them and their bishop the mysteries of the faith. In the early Church only the bishop, as successor of the Apostles, could celebrate Mass in such a place, but after the Church started growing, especially in the countryside, bishops chose collaborators, priests intimately united to him. That is the reason why it would be meaningless to have a priest who is estranged from his bishop or from the community.

WHO IS CONCERNED BY A CATHEDRAL?

If it were only a reference to the bishop’s seat, a bishop would be justified to say, “This is my cathedral.” However, a bishop commissioned by the Holy Father is dedicated to service on behalf of the People of God in such a way that everyone can say, “This is our cathedral church!” All Christians belonging to the diocese should feel at home in their cathedral. As a matter of fact, since 1944 the Church of the Immaculate Conception has not been what it used to be. Since 1880 the people of Notre-Dame-de-Madawaska (also known as Notre-Dame-du-Petit-Sault) had their own parish church. Thanks to Monsignor William J. Conway and to the generosity of his parishioners, a new church was built, the very church which has now been declared a provincial historical site. However, when, in 1944, Pope Pius XII erected the Diocese of Edmundston and named the Church of the Immaculate Conception the cathedral of the new Diocese, this cathedral-church became the gathering place of Catholic Christians of the newly-erected Diocese of Edmundston.

RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Cathedral parishioners retain their church, but they now share its use with their numerous brothers and sisters. I want to express my gratitude to these parishioners of Immaculate Conception Parish. Thanks to your self-sacrifice, you have protected and preserved this beautiful cathedral. An edifice such as this requires

a major expenditure to maintain its soundness, ensure the security of all, and keep it clean. You have not scrimped to keep it beauty, but it is only fair that the entire diocese join you in continuing to protect this historical monument which is without peer in the Atlantic Provinces and, I would dare say, even in all of Canada.

LIVING PRAYERS

However beautiful a cathedral, church or chapel is, it is still less so than a Christian community, it is less "beautiful" than each person forming the Christian community. It follows then that you are all very "beautiful"! One can wax ecstatic about a holy building, but one should feel even more ecstasy before a human being, before each baptised person, who is a temple of the living God. Each baptised person is a precious stone in the structure of the living Church. Let us take the time to take a good look at our brother, at our sister who is with us at the cathedral or the church: this brother and sister are priceless, they have greater worth than any cathedral or church. That is why we must develop a sense of marvel for those we meet every day or every week. It is important to appreciate our cathedral or our parish church which is not only an exceptional heritage site but also the meeting place of all people, living temples of the living God.

A LIVING HERITAGE

The liturgy has a beautiful hymn for the dedication of a church, where we sing of rediscovering together that we are living stones, and to acknowledge that our cathedral, our churches and chapels are schools of faith and prayer, and to look in a new way on our mission regarding the Church heritage handed down to us.

Jesus Christ, cornerstone despised by the builders but exceptional to the Father, we praise you for being living stones in you, built into your house: mysterious communion established and grounded on love. From these lives carved and chiselled by suffering, from these stones where hope has carved its face, you build the sanctuary where the Spirit is, and the Church witnesses to the salvation of all. Jesus Christ, stone and keystone where infinity converges and all creation is afire with love, at the sound of your praise the Holy Spirit draws from these stones the song which arises secretly and joins with the angelic voices, saying, "This is God's home among the people! They will be His People and 'God-with-them' shall be their God!" People called by the prophets and gathered around Christ the Lord, people who listen to their God, Church of the Lord. God with us, God in us, we are the body of Christ! [Cf. La liturgie des heures, IV, pp. 1185, 1181]

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« From A Bishop's Journal » (387) (13 June 2001)