
« LIVING WITH THE HEART » (4)



In my Pastoral Letter *Living with the Heart* I noted that according to Saint John Eudes Christian life consists in continuing the life of Jesus. Today I share with you about the call to holiness given by Pope John Paul II, at the very beginning of the new millennium. This challenge must reach us at the very centre of our lives.

A FATEFUL CHOICE

*The time has come to propose wholeheartedly to everyone this high standard of ordinary Christian living: the whole life of the Christian community and of Christian families must lead in this direction. In fact, to place pastoral planning under the heading of holiness is a choice filled with consequences. It implies the conviction that, since Baptism is a true entry into the holiness of God through incorporation into Christ and the indwelling of his Spirit, it would be a contradiction to settle for a life of mediocrity, marked by a minimalist ethic and a shallow religiosity. To ask catechumens: "Do you wish to receive Baptism?" means at the same time to ask them: "Do you wish to become holy?" It means to set before them the radical nature of the Sermon on the Mount "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt. 5:48). [Pope John Paul II. Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, January 6, 2001, N^o. 31, Tr. Zenit]*

TEARS OF BLOOD

Confronted with his country's dechristianisation, Saint John Eudes stated:

On could shed tears of blood that so many on earth, who have been baptised and therefore admitted to the ranks of God's children as members of Jesus Christ and living temples of the Holy Spirit and therefore committed to live a life in harmony with these divine qualities, nevertheless live like beasts, pagans and, worse still, like devils; none behave as real Christians. What is the cause of such a great evil? There are several, but one of the main ones is that the great majority of these Christians are wrapped in such darkness and in such profound ignorance of things that are theirs, that they don't even know what it means to have been baptised. They do not know what it is to be a Christian. They hardly if ever consider the indescribable graces and incomprehensible favours that God has given them in holy Baptism, and they spend their entire lives without ever thinking about the solemn promises they made to his divine Majesty and the most important obligations they incurred in the holy Contract they made with Jesus, at Baptism. [Man's Contract with God in Holy Baptism, in Lectionary... Tr. LG]

A CALL TO PRAYER AND CONTEMPLATION

In several places in the diocese people take time to pray and to have a prayer corner. Examples are the holy hours held in parish churches and institutions, the prayer time in senior citizens' homes, prayer groups, family prayer, and all those who ask for prayer or who use their suffering as special stepping stones to God. Convinced of the importance of prayer, Saint John Eudes wrote:

The earth on which we live, the air we breathe, the bread we eat, the heart that beats in our chests are not as necessary to man for his bodily life as prayer is to Christian living. [Christian life which the Son of God calls eternal life consists in knowing and loving God. Now, it is in prayer that this divine science is learned.] Prayer is indeed a respectful and loving elevation of mind and heart to God. It is the Christian soul's tender dialogue, holy communication and divine conversation with its God. In this divine exercise, the Christian soul is united to God, the center of its being, its goal and its supreme good. [...] It is through prayer that the soul serves him, pays him homage, gives him adoration and love. In prayer it receives his enlightenment, his blessings and a thousand tokens of his exceedingly great love. [...] Consider prayer as the first, the principal, the most necessary, most pressing and most important of all your undertakings. [The Kingdom of Jesus, in Lectionary, pp. 50-52]

CALL TO MERCY

If St. John Eudes often called his contemporaries to holiness and to prayer, he also often reminded them of God's call to mercy.

He is merciful who bears the miseries of the most wretched in his heart. [In The Admirable Heart]

Commenting on the fourth verse of the Virgin's *Magnificat* – where I took my episcopal and the diocesan motto: "His Love Is from Age to Age" ("*Et misericordia ejus a progenie in progenies*") – he asks:

What is this mercy? It is our good Saviour. That is why the eternal Father is called the Father of mercies, because he is the Father of the Word made flesh who is mercy itself. Mercy requires three things: that it be compassionate for the distress of others; steadfast in alleviating the suffering of the hopeless; and that it go from will to effect. [Ibid.]

« MISSIONARIES OF MERCY »

"Be merciful as your heavenly Father is merciful. It is mercy that I desire, and not sacrifice" (Lk. 6:36; Mt. 9:13), Jesus said to his contemporaries. St. John Eudes was so totally convinced of this that he wanted the members of the Congregation of Jesus and Mary which he founded in 1643 to be "missionaries of mercy". Two years earlier, in 1641, he had founded the Order of Our Lady of Charity to help women in dangerous situations of delinquency or prostitution. People of the twenty-first century hunger just as much for mercy; they thirst just as much for this *Love [which] is from age to age*. Our countrymen are just as appreciative today of acts of kindness and help offered in our midst throughout the year. The awarding of the Bishop Marie-Antoine Roy Prize was an opportunity to acknowledge all the marks of friendship and fellowship expressed to the handicapped, the sick, the bereaved, the poor, and battered women. The International Year of Volunteers is a special opportunity for us to acknowledge all these free and generous commitments.

+ François Thibodeau

+ François Thibodeau
Bishop of Edmundston

« From A Bishop's Journal » (396) (01 August 2001)