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## LESSONS FROM THE 1951 CONGRESS, WHICH ARE STILL TIMELY

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Looking back on the 1951 Diocesan Marian Congress, I find that there are three major lessons to be drawn, lessons which are still timely today: Marian devotion, eucharistic celebration, and prayer for vocations.

### MARIAN DEVOTION

It was in gratitude to the Lord for the great wonder of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary that the Diocese of Edmundston organised a Marian congress in St-Basile. On November 1, 1950, Pope Pius XII proclaimed the dogma of the Assumption in the following terms: *«At the end of her life on earth, the Immaculate Mother of God was raised body and soul to the glory of heaven.»* A consequence of her divine maternity, Mary's assumption is, for all humankind, a sign of hope and a promise of resurrection. The body which carried the Word Incarnate in its womb and which never experienced the stain of sin, could not experience the corruption which follows death. Like her Son, Mary fully enjoys the total glory which will be ours at the end of time. Joined to Christ in his suffering, she is now united to him in his triumph. The Church celebrates in Mary the complete fulfilment of the Easter mystery, an extraordinary privilege which she alone enjoys. The Church sees in Mary the woman who has finally triumphed against the Enemy. She is also the sign of another victory, that of the Church itself which, at the end of its long struggle, will harvest the fruit of the Easter victory. We are invited to sing with Elisabeth the blessedness of Mary, a blessedness which will one day also be that of the entire Church.

The feast of the Assumption, celebrated as far back as the sixth century, is a call to gratitude and hope. Our ancestors in the faith never tired of extolling the marvels which the Lord worked in Mary. August 15, 2002 will mark the fifty-sixth anniversary of the episcopal ordination of Edmundston's first bishop. On that occasion, the Apostolic Delegate declared: *«Your ancestors built this country in suffering and tears, but always under the protection of the Virgin, the shining, brilliant light of your lives. Mary guided, supported, encouraged and strengthened them along the course of their lives. A people with such devotion to Mary finds the way to its development and its true glory.»*

I urge you to listen carefully to the words I shall say, in the Preface: *«Today the Virgin Mother of God was taken up into heaven to be the beginning and the pattern of the Church in its perfection, and a sign of hope and comfort for your people on their pilgrim way.»* I suggest also that, time permitting, you carefully read what Vatican Council II has to say on the Virgin Mary and her place and role in the great mystery of Jesus and his Church; this will help us develop a Marian spirituality which is proper, biblical, liturgical, ecumenical, and experienced according to our culture today and the teaching of our Church.

### FIRST MASS

In 1951, our parents and grandparents wanted to mark the three hundredth anniversary of the first Mass said in the Madawaska region. This was a great gesture on their part. They knew about the infinite value of every Mass. From tradition, religious instruction, and the catechism, they knew about this great sacrament of our faith, and they wanted to recall this first Mass celebrated by Jesuit Father Gabriel Drouillette, in 1651.

We who have just been through five diocesan eucharistic congresses, we who have experienced the exceptional liturgical renewal brought about by the Second Vatican Council are invited to deepen more and more our understanding of this great gesture of Jesus. It is so very important to gather together at least every Sunday, to listen to the Word of God and receive the Body and Blood of Christ. May our remembering of this first Mass encourage us to renew our faith in the presence of Jesus in the midst of our lives. We are lucky, in the Edmundston Deanery: close to twenty Masses are celebrated every Sunday; not all the deaneries are this lucky. For instance, in Southern Victoria Deanery Sunday Mass is celebrated only every second week. Since there are only two priests to minister to eight parishes, the eucharistic celebration alternates with Word liturgies. Let us acknowledge the great privilege we have, of celebrating the Eucharist every Sunday, in our parish churches.

## **VOCATIONS**

Throughout the 1951 Diocesan Marian Congress, the people prayed the Lord to continue sending holy priests, religious, and missionaries to his Church. At the time, there was no talk of pastoral agents, of a restored diaconate, of lay people involved in pastoral ministry, or pastoral teams. It was through Vatican Council II that we rediscovered collegiality, co-responsibility, and the missionary vocation of all the baptised. I am sure that all the prayers offered at the 1951 Marian Congress have borne fruit and have allowed the Church of Edmundston and countless other churches throughout the world to have priests, religious, and generous lay people who can respond to the needs of their brothers and sisters, who can adapt to time and circumstances, and who are responsive to the calls of the Holy Spirit.

Who could say that it was not in response to the prayers of the 1951 Marian Congress, that so many priestly, religious, and missionary vocations arose in the 1950s, '60s, and even in the year 2000? Who could say that it was not these prayers which helped us go through the diocesan pastoral restructuring with serenity and confidence? Who could say that it was not these prayers which brought about the School of Faith, the pastoral formation sessions, and our diocesan seminary?

Taking our cue from our forebears, we, too, must continue to pray the Lord to send good Gospel workers. A priestless Church is something unheard-of. The Lord assured us that he would give his Church pastors according to the heart of God. Let us acknowledge the high calling of priestly vocations, and let us carefully nurture them in our families. Let us hold the religious life in great esteem, and show gratitude to all the religious brothers and sisters who have accomplished so much in our milieu: they were giants of holiness, and tireless workers. Let us be concerned with encouraging missionary vocations. International solidarity and globalization have become part of our daily vocabulary, but we still need generous people dedicated to the universal solidarity of the heart.

May this St-Basile festivity commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the Marian Congress and the three hundred fiftieth anniversary of the first Mass in the Madawaska renew our devotion to Mary, our love of the Eucharist, and our commitment to promoting vocations.

*+ François Thibodeau*

+ François Thibodeau  
Bishop of Edmundston

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