
« YOU WHO HAVE THE LIGHT »



A French hymn which is often sung at penitential services says: "What are you doing with the light you have? You who have the light, enlighten us! What has happened to those who believed in us? What is happening to those who believed, especially, that it is possible to love and to give if we can see even the dark? Humans who have taken the road searching for life and for the peace of friends see people crushed by time who no longer know how to be simply happy. If you who have the light hide it under a bushel basket, dowse it in the water of a running stream, hide it in the cracks of a rock, or pour it on the side of a path... what are you doing with it? If you hang it onto the clouds, if you place it in the marketplace, or sow it in the fields or scatter it to the winds..."

THE LIGHTS WE SEE

As I join you in preparing for the Seventeenth World Youth Day, I catch myself wondering who are the young people who have left their mark – and still do – in the history of our Church and our society. For the most part, those going to Toronto will be between the ages of 16 to 35. Wouldn't it be interesting, then, to "name" some of our own young people? A few names immediately come to mind. Singer Roch Voisine was not yet thirty when he became an international star, and the same can be said of Natasha St-Pier. Several young people who were members of Mgr. Daigle's P'tits Violons have also gained a certain notoriety. By checking the historical accounts of our parishes I have come across quite a few names of people who have left their mark in sports, in political life, in artistic life, and in religious life. Most of our religious priests, sisters and brothers were hardly older than twenty-five at the time they made their commitments to religious life. Many were the teachers and schoolmasters who were hardly older than their students who were, for them, witnesses, guides, and masters. Many are the young parents who were outstanding persons, in their families. Married around the age of twenty, sometimes earlier, they gave their all for their children and loved ones, even in difficult and desperate economic times. On the many cenotaphs in our cities, towns and villages we read the names of those brave people who gave up their lives for their country. I think that it is inspiring to recall all these young people: they can challenge us to become more "salt of the earth and light of the world" in our time.

YOUNG LOUIS

On a personal note, when I first came to Université Saint-Louis in Edmundston as a seminarian, in 1960-1961, I was twenty-one. I remember that in the university foyer there stood a statue of Saint Louis, with his motto, "Dieu le veut!" – "God wants it!" I then learned that Université Saint-Louis was named after the late Monsignor Louis-Napoléon Dugal who was pastor at St-Basile from 1880 to 1929; he was also a friend of youth. Saint Louis was one of the most important figures of the thirteenth century. "Fount of justice," he exercised his kingly power according to Gospel values. It was his faithfulness to the Gospel that made him do good and loyal justice, at the court of Vincennes, France. As a tribute to the place of his baptism in 1214, he called himself "Louis de Poissy", and his sense of Church made him a patron of monastic life in his kingdom. Louis became a saint by exercising his charge of king as a God's minister. Saint Louis, who died in 1270, led an exemplary life: his reputation as a virtuous man of integrity won for him universal esteem and made him on a number of occasions an arbiter of Christian Europe. There is no doubt that so great a man has left his mark on many young people who have made it through Université Saint-Louis.

IN OUR MIDST

In his book *Histoire du Madawaska*, historian Father Thomas Albert introduces us to two young persons remarkable for their courage and determination. The first is a young Heroine of Maliseet legend, Malabeam. A visit to the great falls at Grand Falls remind us of the story. Rather than betray the presence of her people, she chose to die in the raging waters at Grand Falls. "The Maliseet heroine has been sung in the Abenaki, French and English tongues. But what a subject this would be for a future historian of the Madawaska region! Greek history, with all of its legends of greatness have nothing as great and uplifting as the simple and little-known sacrifice of the unsung young girl of the woods."

CRADLE OF THE MADAWASKA REGION

The other young person Father Albert refers to is Alphonsine Ranger, Canadian and Acadian, better known as Sister Maillet: "What learned and apostolic men did not attempt, a woman has accomplished." She was only 27 when she came to the St-Basile convent on October 10, 1873, to remain there 61 eventful years in her life, her community, and the Madawaska region as whole. Poverty and hardship bordering on misery, while unknown to those outside, was the lot of the community of sisters, at the time. In 1876, the situation of the convent became very critical: "The winter had been bitter, and both the water and the bread had frozen; the Sisters could not sleep, the stoves could not warm them because of the green wood; the house stood shaky on its wooden foundation and the roof threatened to fly off at the least wind." The Sisters were going through difficult times, and their future would be decided on shortly. Sister Maillet does not give up the fight, though. The threat hanging over the small Hôtel-Dieu brings forth from her solid arguments for this foundation of the Hospitallers of St. Joseph in the region. During the night of September 18, 1876, she goes to the chapel and there on the steps of the altar she writes a letter to Bishop Bourget of Montreal. This letter will decide the bishop to authorise the Sisters to remain in the Madawaska region. Sister Maillet would take up every challenge in the fields of consecrated life, education, and hospital care. A young woman of determination, faith, and courage." I leave it to you to come up with examples of other young people in our midst who were "salt of the earth and light of the world".

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