
THAT LOVE MAY BE FROM AGE TO AGE...



My heart is filled with gratitude and serenity, on this ninth day of January, 2004. How could it be otherwise? At first sight, these ten years I have lived with my beloved Church of Edmundston are without comparison with my years of study, teaching, and social ministry, or those of my tenure as editor of *Pastorale Québec*, and not even with my years as provincial of the Eudist congregation in North America... My ten years as bishop are like a summation of all I experienced at each of these different periods of my ministry. In God's garden there are some very special plants that cannot grow and develop without persistent loving care.

A CHALLENGING FIDELITY

In the last pages he wrote, in 1920, on the history of the Madawaska region, Father Thomas Albert stated: "Between the past and its memories, and the future with its hopes and expectations, there is the present where our duty lies. Taught by the past, in the light of the present, we can tell what tomorrow will be if we remain faithful to our God-given mission... We shall be tomorrow what today we want to be, tomorrow. Under God's watchful eye, we are the makers of our destiny. The work of our future is in our hands, provided we remain faithful to God's plans for us."

A LOVE STORY

Like all of you, like all believers of times past, I could list God's many kindnesses to me in the course of my life, but especially since 1994. At each wonderful recollection I could exclaim and even sing, "For his love is everlasting!" "He has anointed me with the oil of gladness, for his love is everlasting!" "He has given me the fullness of the priesthood, for his love is everlasting!" "He has given me an outstanding presbyterium, for his love is everlasting!" "He has given me thirty-two Christian communities, for his love is everlasting!" "He has given me wise, prudent, and loyal counsellors for pastoral, presbyteral, and economic affairs, for his love is everlasting!" "He has given me the privilege to experience five diocesan eucharistic congresses, for his love is everlasting!" "He has given me the blessing of experiencing thirty-two most stimulating pastoral visitations, for his love is everlasting!" "He has allowed me to ordain five new priests, for his love is everlasting!" "He has given me the occasion to form parish pastoral teams, for his love is everlasting!" "He has helped me promote family- and parish-based religious education, for his love is everlasting!" "He has helped me provide diocesan support services, for his love is everlasting!" "He has helped me find the means necessary for follow-up of the diocesan Synod recommendations, for his love is everlasting!" "He gives me hope for a good outcome to the diocesan fund-raising campaign, for his love is everlasting!" Our thanksgiving could go on and on, because the Lord never stops giving countless blessings to our Church, to persons, couples, families, communities, pastoral zones, and the diocese as a whole.

WE ARE THE BODY OF CHRIST

If there is one statement we must always keep in mind, it is the following: It is all together that we form the Body of Christ. "Just as the body is one, though composed of many parts, and the parts, though distinct, together form one body, so is it with Christ." This is probably where my experience as a bishop has been most affected: in the discovery that together we form one Body, and that my main task -- which is also that of every person involved in pastoral ministry -- is to contribute to the building up of the Body of Christ. Our distinctive cultural makeup marks us off as a distinctive diocese, with the French, English, and Maliseet cultures weaving the fabric of our distinction. We should be proud of this! However, more than by language, culture, or social status, it is through faith that we form one Body, the Church. From the very first months of my coming to Edmundston, when we were preparing the festivities marking the diocese's fiftieth anniversary, we needed to be reminded of this great gift of our being one Body, one Church in Christ. Besides, the diocesan eucharistic congresses gave us a better understanding of this great mystery of our faith. The present diocesan financial

campaign brings home to us the fact that together we form one Body, and one Church. A diocese cannot exist without the bishop who joins it to the other Churches; and parishes cannot exist without ties of faith, hope, and charity with one another. Like the diocesan services, the bishop's mission is to promote the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ raised from the dead, who revealed the Father's love to us. It would be a grave theological and pastoral error to oppose diocese and parish.

THE FUTURE IS IN OUR HANDS

Father Thomas Albert's comment above is impressive, provocative, and stimulating: our future is in our hands provided we remain faithful to God's plans for us. God's designs were clearly manifested throughout the diocesan Synod and the years following. We have no choice: If we want a vibrant, dynamic, and missionary Church, we must firmly establish family- and parish-based religious education for both children and adults. If we want to adequately respond to God's plans for our families and especially our youth, we have no choice about developing a family and youth ministry sparkling with enthusiasm. If we want every Christian community, each parish to be, first and foremost, a true place of life and holiness, of faith education, celebration, fellowship, and Gospel sharing, we have no choice but to help one another, diocese and parishes, promote and develop pastoral and community activities. The future is really in our hands. We have the opportunity to continue building our Church together.

HIS LOVE WILL CONTINUE

Just as our ancestors left us the best legacy possible, knowledge of and reverence for the love of God, so do we want to pass on this love, this legacy, to coming generations. As for me, I pledge as I did ten years ago, to give my all in service to this Love.

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