
HOMAGE TO OUR NEW POPE



On behalf of the Edmundston diocesan Church and in my own name, I sent a congratulatory message to our new Pope Benedict XVI, to assure him of our communion, prayer, affection, and solidarity. Ever since the death of Pope John Paul II, the Church had been praying to be given the shepherd she needed, a shepherd after the heart of God, a man filled with the Holy Spirit, who would guide us according to the will of God.

“LET US PRAY FOR THE HOLY FATHER”

Like Jesus himself and like Saint Benedict (480-547) who marked his own time with prayer and work, the whole Church must always be at prayer. The best help we can offer the new pope is certainly our daily prayer, whether at home, at work, or at church; it is an indispensable element of his ministry. At the inauguration of his pontificate, Benedict XVI said: “I am not alone! I must not carry alone what in reality I could never carry alone. The host of the saints of God protect me, support me, and carry me. And your prayer, dear friends, your indulgence, your love, your faith and hope go with me.” At every Mass we shall pray for the Holy Father: “Remember, Lord, our Church throughout the world. Make it grow in love together with Pope Benedict, our Bishop François and all the bishops.” Even at children’s masses, we pray: “Come to the aid, Lord, of our Pope Benedict, our Bishop François and all the bishops; grant us and all the disciples of Jesus Christ, to be among those who spread peace and happiness around them.” The prayers suggested for the pope refer to his indispensable ministry: “God who ordains everything in wisdom, you made Saint Peter the head of the Apostles, the stone on which you built your Church; look kindly on the pope you have chosen to succeed him. May he be an unshakable rock, capable of confirming his people in the faith and of keeping them in the same communion. Help him to serve those committed to his care, by his word and example. Help him support all his brothers and sisters. May he ensure the Church’s unity, love, and peace, may all the Church be in communion with him, and all will find in you, our Father, truth and life.” There is so much spiritual and doctrinal richness, in these simple prayers.

A SOUVENIR CROSS

On several occasions I talked about the pectoral cross which Pope John Paul II gave me on Saturday, November 6, 1993, as we were leaving his private chapel, following a fraternal meal with him and all the Atlantic bishops. In the centre of the cross there is the scene of Simon Peter’s “election” as “Rock of the Church.” The scene is described in Saint John’s Gospel (21:15ff.), and it was recalled at the papal inauguration: “When they had eaten their meal, Jesus said to Simon Peter: ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?’ ‘Yes, Lord,’ he said, ‘you know that I love you.’ At which Jesus said, ‘Feed my lambs.’ A second time he put his question, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me?’ ‘Yes, Lord,’ Peter said, ‘you know that I love you.’ Jesus replied, ‘Tend my sheep.’ A third time Jesus asked him, ‘Simon, son of John, do you love me?’ Peter was hurt because he had asked him a third time, ‘Do you love me?’ So he said to him, ‘Lord, you know everything. You know well that I love you.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Feed my sheep. I tell you most solemnly: as a young man you fastened your belt and went about as you pleased; but when you are older, you will stretch out your hands, and another will tie you fast and carry you off against your will.’ ” An extraordinary scene, and it is engraved on my pectoral cross. It explains Peter’s mission at the heart of the apostolic college. Like the father in a family, he must proclaim the Word of God, celebrate the sacraments, serve his brothers and sisters, and keep them in the same faith, the same love, and the same hope. Without an indefectible love of Christ Jesus, without a passionate love of Christ, no pope, no bishop could adequately accomplish the ministry given to him. Like Peter and Paul, only Christ means anything, and it is in him that the pope reaches his brothers and sisters throughout the world.

PETER'S TEMPTATION

Close to the catacomb of Saint Sixtus in Rome there is the *Domine Quo Vadis* Church. The words *Quo Vadis* became popular through the great novel of Nobel Prize winner for Literature Henrik Sienkiewicz (1840-1916), who wrote a book with that title. According to tradition, it was at that place that Saint Peter, who was on the verge of fleeing Rome to avoid imprisonment and torture, met Christ Jesus on the Appian Way. Peter allegedly asked him, "*Domine, quo vadis?* Lord, where are you going?" And Jesus answered, "*Venio Romam iterum crucifigi.* I am coming to Rome to be crucified anew." Confronted with all the problems brought to the new pope, whether at the level of the family, the international level, or the levels of peace, unity, and evangelisation, couldn't the new pope have a reaction similar to Peter's? I don't believe so. Besides, the first Christians, far from fleeing persecution, considered it a special grace to suffer for Christ and to give up their lives for him. Another scene is more appropriate, to me, to describe the new pope's task: in Saint Peter's Basilica, on the right hand side there is a statue of Saint Peter. It has been so venerated through the centuries that the foot has worn down smooth. The statue shows Peter with his arm in a sling, as the hand holds the keys, showing that his mission is unbelievably heavy.

IN THE JOY OF MEETING HIM SOON

Thousands of youth will have the opportunity of meeting the new pope in August, at the XXth World Youth Day in Cologne, Germany; his predecessor had so looked forward to being there! He had written to these young people: "The Church needs authentic witnesses for the new evangelisation, men and women who can communicate this experience to others. The Church needs saints. We are all called to holiness, and only saints can renew the world." As he repeated the words of his predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI addressed the youth in this way: "Do not be afraid of Christ! He takes nothing away and gives everything. Whoever dedicates himself to him receives a hundredfold. Yes, open, open wide the doors to Christ, and you will find true life." As for me and the other Canadian bishops, we are supposed to meet him in 2006. While awaiting this happy day, let us pray for our new pope: may the Lord keep him healthy, may he renew him and make him happy, now! May his mission be filled with great joy, as was announced at his election. May this joy fill the one who has been elected.

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