



From A Bishop's Journal (615)

What Church Are We Building?

This was the theme of two recent diocesan study sessions with participants from all the parishes in the diocese; they were animated by Mrs. Sylvie Latreille of the Dominican Pastoral Institute in Montréal, and Sister Marie-Paule Couturier, f.m.a., of the Diocese of Gaspé. It was with courage, tenacity, and determination that our predecessors built churches that are our pride and joy. Today it is especially the Church's spiritual edifice that we must continue to build. This edifice is never completed, and it is our efforts, bound together by the charity and power of the Spirit, that allow us to continue.

What Does it Mean, to Build?

Examples of building construction are not lacking, in our region: it can refer to the endless Highway 185 from Rivière-du-Loup to Edmundston, or work on the Trans Canada divided highway. If we need to have a solid building project and sufficient funds to respond to the needs of the present and future population, it is also important to have many qualified workers and appropriate machinery and tools. These new constructions take time and money. We cannot skip any steps, otherwise we risk having to start all over again. And it takes patience and humour, too. It requires concerted effort, courage, unity in diversity, and eventual differences. We need to know how to weather storms, since nice weather is not always our lot. There needs to be a strong sense of belonging, a committed people who are faithful, goodwill that will often be tested, and even starting anew. The idea of construction can wonderfully illustrate the "work sites" we are called upon to be involved in, in our respective communities and in our diocesan Church as a whole.

What Church Are We Talking About?

Whenever we talk of the Church there are a great number of images that come to mind: the warm, welcoming house, a priceless garden, a welcoming and sharing place, a mother, a boat, a building. Vatican Council II used over thirty biblical images to help us deepen the mystery of the Church, because it is a reality which is beyond us and which we shall never cease to understand, a mystery of love and communion which binds us to the Blessed Trinity. The Father so loved the world that He gave us His Son, and the Holy Spirit has filled our hearts with the love of God. It is a mystery of communion that connects us to our brothers and sisters of yesterday and today: this is our faith

in the communion of saints. The Church is the Body of Christ, the mystical Body of Christ, the temple of the Spirit, the gathering of the baptised; it is the place of fraternal commitment and witness to the risen Christ; it is the sum of our beliefs, our activities, our institutions, our legislation; it is all our communities, our networks, our pastoral zones, our way of being Church through our different councils and our local and diocesan administration. The Church is also celebration and sacrament, a place where we discover meaning for our lives, a place related to time, to our ancestors, our families, traditions, and history. No key word, no image, no symbol can exhaust the meaning of Church.

The Pentecost Event

In the Acts of the Apostles (2:1-47), Saint Luke describes the founding event of the Church. The story helps us see that the Church is also an event. The fact of reading this story both individually and as a community helps us discover several aspects of the Church. The Church is an initiative of the Spirit, a gift of the Spirit to all the nations, a public event, an unexpected happening, the proclamation of a Good News, a testimony of Peter and his brother apostles. We also find elements of conversion, to welcome the Gospel. The community takes shape, and we are shown an ideal of community life. Four pivots of Christian life are proposed: faith education, communion, celebration, and transformation: from this the Church develops, it receives a mission, and is sent out to proclaim the Good News of salvation. Still today this mission is given to the Church, with all the hope that it brings forth and the requirements needed.

Pentecost Events in Our Midst

If Pentecost was a striking, founding, and unforgettable event for Jesus' first disciples, certain recent events in our Christian communities were major instances of the Holy Spirit's constant presence, as were also unprecedented, "surprise events" which show the exceptional vitality of our community. Close to fifty events, these past few years, have been identified. Let us just note the establishment of the School of Faith and the École de la Foi which aided in the holding of the 1987-1990 Diocesan Synod, the parish missions and retreats, the appointment of a new bishop, the celebration of the five Eucharistic Congresses in preparation for the year 2000, five ordinations to the priesthood, the formation of parish pastoral teams, baptism preparation teams and pastoral ministry to the sick, the setting up of youth ministry and family ministry, the setting up of the parish- and family-based catechetics programme, the commitment of lay people to the Church, the major financial campaign, the welcome of the reliquary of St. Thérèse of Lisieux, the televised mass of the Edmundston graduating class, sacramental celebrations in parishes, the opening of the Carrefour d'immigration rurale in Saint-Léonard, the visit of the World Youth Day cross to all our parishes, the World Youth Day itself, the Charismatic renewal, etc. Like those who experienced the first Pentecost, we, too, are called to proclaim God's mighty deeds.

Follow-up

These exhilarating hours lived together as Church will continue throughout the year. A document will be prepared, shortly, based on all the observations received from the parishes. This will bring us to the Pastoral Orientation Congress of March 14-15, 2006. "Church of Always, listening to the world, do you feel the powers of history welling up? Church of Always, Gospel to the world, flow on as a river of peace, carry along our story!" (*Liturgie des heures*).

+ François Thibodeau *in*

+ François Thibodeau, C.J.M.
Bishop of Edmundston

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