



From A Bishop's Journal (642)

From the Gospel to the Gospels

Level Four of the family- and parish-based catechetical programme leads me in directions I had not suspected, agreeable and beneficial directions. Level Four prompts me to reflect on the contents of the Gospels and to read over again the introductions to the books of the New Testament. I know that the Bible is comprised of 72 very different “books”, but I realise that each of the 27 writings in the New Testament was written with a specific object in mind, and addressed to specific groups or persons. Several of these documents were written between the years 60 and 100, that is, more than 30 years after the death of Jesus.

People of Their Time

Despite the fact that there are many similarities between the Gospels, and despite the fact that three of them are called “synoptics” because they have a common basic plan, we can still see the richness and diversity of each Gospel. Matthew’s Gospel brings us into communion with Christians with “Jewish” roots. Matthew constantly insists that the Holy Scriptures are fulfilled, and that they invariably refer to the Law and the Prophets. The Palestine community remembers how Jesus suffered from the misunderstanding and distrust of the Jewish religious leaders. The community also remembers how Jesus admired the faith of a Roman soldier. Before going back to his Father, Jesus promised his disciples that he would be with them and would support them. He would always be with them. Not only the first words but also the last words of Saint Matthew’s Gospel bring us into contact with Emmanuel, “God-with-Us”. We read the following words in the Gospel’s first chapter: “The virgin shall be with child and give birth to a son, and they shall call him Emmanuel, a name which means ‘God is with us’.” And the final verses of the Gospel say: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations. Baptise them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Teach them to carry out everything I have commanded you. And know that I am with you always, until the end of the world.”

With Peter’s Disciple

The community in Rome remembered the sufferings Jesus endured: the misunderstanding of the disciples, the insults, and death on the cross. The Christians remind themselves that Jesus is the Son

of God, but that he is also the crucified man. They now realise that even if they go through similar trials, they shall win. The evangelist Mark, who was a close collaborator of the apostle Peter, states, in his thoughtful narrative, “The Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” He writes his gospel in support of the Christians who had travelled far to preach the Good News: The Lord continued to work with them throughout and to confirm the message through the signs which accompanied them, as Mark states at the end of his Gospel.

Words of Mercy

The Gospel of Saint Luke unveils more and more to our eyes the kindness and mercy of God. All we need do is read the parable of the “recovered” sheep and the “found” son, to marvel at the kindness of God. The community at Antioch remembered how Jesus had been close to the sick, the poor, and the rejected of society. Jesus was really the Saviour. Like Jesus the Saviour, Christians must serve the poor and society’s rejects. Jesus’ discourse in the synagogue at Nazareth repeated the prophet Isaiah, whose words summarised Jesus’ mission: “The spirit of the Lord is upon me; therefore he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind and release to prisoners, to announce a year of favour from the Lord.”

He Dwelt among Us

With Saint John the Evangelist, the community at Ephesus recalled Jesus’ actions so that there would be more life around him. We only need to recall Jesus’ talk with Nicodemus and with the Samaritan woman, his discourse on the Bread of Life, and the great signs he gave, like at Cana, beside the pool at Bethesda, at the multiplication of the bread, or when he calmed the storm. Jesus was truly sent by the Father, he is the Son of the Living God. The Christians, therefore, strive to bring more life around them. They remember Jesus’ words: “I have come that they may have life, and life to the full.” “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we have seen his glory: the glory of an only Son coming from the Father, filled with enduring love. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, ever at the Father’s side, who has revealed him.”

Other Precious Documents

Besides the four Gospels and the letters of Paul, Peter, John, and James, the New Testament has two other precious books that are like a continuation of the Gospels. There is, first, the Acts of the Apostles, written by Saint Luke and which is like an extension of his Gospel proclaiming the Good News of Jesus from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. Thanks to the Holy Spirit, communities are founded, conversions multiply, and salvation is proclaimed to the nations. Through the life of the Churches, the very life of Jesus is reflected, as he says to everyone: “I am with you always, until the end of time.” Saint John’s Book of Revelation is also an extension of a Gospel. Through the persecutions and trials of the end of the first century, John asserts the all-powerful presence of the

Risen Christ. Revelation is the great book of hope, the book of the faithful Witness, the first-born from the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth.

Maran Atha

Throughout the New Testament, a wonderful hymn is sung, filled with hope as it contemplates the new heaven and the new earth: “Maran Atha,” “Come, Lord Jesus.” The Church, the New Jerusalem, is associated with the victory and the life of the Risen One. It is “a royal and priestly” people, celebrating forever the liturgy of thanksgiving.

+ François Thibodeau, J.M.

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

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