



From A Bishop's Journal (649)

Third “*ad Limina*” Visit

Since my appointment, on October 20, 1993 as bishop of Edmundston I have had the opportunity of making three “*ad Limina*” visits to the tombs of the Apostles Peter and Paul, in November 1993, September 1999, and May 2006. However tiring they were because of the many and diversified meetings: daily Eucharists, meetings with the Holy Father, and nineteen visits to the different Pontifical Congregations and Councils, still, they were very exciting.

“The Splendour of Truth”

On May 20, Pope Benedict XVI met the bishops of the Atlantic region: Bishops Claude Champagne, O.M.I. (Auxiliary at Halifax) and Douglas Crosby, O.M.I. of St. George's and Labrador-Schefferville, Martin Currie of Grand Falls, NL, Vernon Fougere of Charlottetown, Raymond Lahey of Antigonish, Faber MacDonald of Saint John, Valéry Vienneau of Bathurst; and Archbishops Brendan O'Brien of St. John's, NL, Terrence Prendergast, S.J. of Halifax, André Richard, C.S.C. of Moncton, and myself, bishop of Edmundston. Father Daniel Deveau, C.S.C., the AEA *pro tem* secretary, accompanied us. After giving thanks for the evangelisation work in our country by our predecessors and us, the Holy Father pointed out the proud heritage of faith and hope that is found in the rich social diversity of our country. He said: “Like many countries, however, Canada is today suffering from the pervasive effects of secularism... One of the more dramatic symptoms of this mentality, clearly evident in your own region, is the plummeting birth rate... Faced with the many social ills and moral ambiguities which follow in the wake of a secularist ideology, Canadians look to you to be men of hope, preaching and teaching with passion the splendour of the truth of Christ...”

Churches of Communion

Acknowledging the richness and importance of our quinquennial reports, the Holy Father thanked us for responding to the needs raised by the pastoral renewal of our communities. He noted the efforts made in the area of catechetics, especially with children and youth, so that every baptised person may discover the richness of his/her baptism. “In your plan of pastoral renewal, you are faced with the delicate task of the reorganization of parishes and also of dioceses. This can never be carried

out in an appropriate way by simple social models of restructuring. Without Christ, we can do nothing. Prayer roots us in truth, reminds us incessantly of the primacy of Christ and, in union with him, the primacy of the interior life and of holiness. The parishes are, therefore, rightly considered above all as houses and schools of communion... This calls for a pastoral promotion of holiness.”

Reviving Our Passion for Evangelisation

As he continued his reflection with the bishops of the Atlantic, Pope Benedict XVI stated: “I am certain that the rediscovery of Jesus Christ made flesh, our saviour, will lead to a rediscovery of the personal, social and cultural identity of the faithful. Far from confusing the diversity and complementarity of the charisms and functions of ordained ministers and lay faithful, a reinforced Catholic identity will revive the passion for evangelisation, which is proper to the vocation of every believer and of the nature of the Church.” Following this call to holiness and to evangelisation, the Holy Father expressed his gratitude to all the priests and religious of our dioceses, and to all the lay people. As a sign of gratitude he gave us his apostolic blessing.

Monday, May 22, 2006

I experienced such unforgettable moments, during this visit: mass at the tombs of Saints Peter and Paul, visit to the basilicas of Saint John Lateran and Saint Mary Major, and a visit to the tomb of His Holiness Pope John Paul II. However, Monday May 22, at 11:15 A.M., will long be for me an unforgettable day, when His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI received me in private audience. After a few moments of introduction and picture taking, the Holy Father welcomed me like a brother, and he asked about the Edmundston diocesan Church. He took time to look at the three books I authored in the past two years, as well as at my new pastoral letter on the baptismal call: he repeated again the importance of such a topic. We talked about the state of the diocese, of its priests, seminarians, religious, and lay people. We talked about our five eucharistic congresses, our pastoral orientation congress, of our challenges and our successes. The audience lasted fifteen minutes, but they were moments of intense communion. He then once again gave his apostolic blessing to all the faithful of the diocese.

Pastoral Meetings

I just want to list here the nineteen visits to the various Roman Congregations and Councils: the Congregation of Bishops, Catholic Education, Causes of the Saints, Clergy, Doctrine of the Faith, Divine Worship, Eastern Churches, Evangelisation of Nations, Health Services, Interreligious Dialogue, Justice and Peace, “*Cor Unum*,” Consecrated Life, Laity, Christian Unity, Social Communications, Secretariat of State, etc. We shared together on these many topics, a review of all our episcopal responsibilities and of the mutual relations we have, on these questions.

Fraternal Visit

During these two weeks I resided with my Eudist confreres in Rome. I was very happy to see the Superior General, Father Michel Gérard and his assistant, Father Bernard Cantin, along with the other six Eudist confreres. “How good it is to live together as brothers!” I also had the opportunity

of seeing Sister Claudette Ruest, S.M., who welcomed me at her mother house. Thank you one and all for all your prayers during this special pilgrimage of mine.

+ *François Thibodeau*

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

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