



From A Bishop's Journal (669)

Congratulations, Bishop Dionne!

On Saturday, October 28, 2006, the New Brunswick Knights of Columbus State Council honoured its past state chaplain Bishop Dionne with its Order's most prestigious award, the Medal of Merit. I want to congratulate and thank my brother Knights for their gesture of kindness, gratitude, and friendship. I also congratulate Bishop Dionne for this great honour rendered him, an honour he fraternally accepts.

October 23, 1993

There are not too many in the diocese who are unaware that on October 20, 1993, at the moment I accepted my appointment as fifth bishop of Edmundston from Pope John Paul II, Bishop Gérard Dionne's resignation as fourth bishop of Edmundston came into effect. However, looking back on Bishop Dionne's last thirteen years, one can rightfully ask, "What is retirement?" because, truth to say, Bishop Dionne has not stopped being active. At 87 years of age, he still walks with a firm step, and there are many who would be unable to follow him on the golf course!

A More Than Active Retirement

I myself have not been able to follow him everywhere! He has an extraordinary pastoral enthusiasm. In May he accepted a new mandate as judicial vicar and judge at our marriage tribunal, to help couples undergoing marriage difficulties. And how many are the masses, baptisms, weddings, and funerals he has celebrated, all these years? God knows! I have been told that in one day he presided three funerals... He accepted the position of "administrator" of two parishes, and he has given quite a few retreats, tridiums, and days of recollection. The retreats he gave were both in our diocese and elsewhere in dioceses and religious communities. He has written two books, *Petite histoire* and *Je suis votre frère*. In the first of these he writes about the Dionne family history, and in the second he reflects on his episcopal ministry. He has been president of the Hôtel-Dieu-de-Saint-Joseph Foundation, in Saint Basile, and of the Bob Fife Foundation. He continues being in contact with the Edmundston diocese's missionaries in foreign lands. He was designated the 2006 Richelieu Personality of the Year. Despite this long enumeration, I am sure that the list is incomplete.

A Man of Prayer and of the Word

The list is certainly incomplete, because I have not mentioned yet that he dedicates over two hours each day to prayer, meditation, praying the divine office and the rosary. As Bishop Fernand Lacroix pointed out to me at my ordination, the main task of a bishop, whether he be titular bishop or bishop emeritus, is always the task of prayer. As we can see in the Acts of the Apostles, the two main tasks which the Apostles had received from Christ Jesus were to be with him, faithful to prayer and to proclaiming the Word. Even today, despite the many tasks to be done, the priest's and the bishop's two main ones still remain prayer and proclaiming the Word.

Bishop Dionne's Charism

When Bishop Dionne regales us with his first experience preaching in the Notre-Dame-des-Sept-Douleurs parish church, when he was appointed curate, there, following his priestly ordination in 1948, he tells how Monsignor Numa Pichette initiated him in this ministry: every Sunday usually carried with it four sermons! However, for Father Dionne the main thing was that the people understand the Word of God which had just been proclaimed to them. We must remember that before the Second Vatican Council which was held from October, 1962 to December, 1965, the sacred texts were proclaimed in Latin. It was this same concern to have the people understand the Word of God that led Bishop Dionne to institute the School of Faith, first in the diocese of Sault St. Marie, and then in our diocese, in 1985 (French) and 1986 (English). He was convinced that Sunday preaching was not sufficiently long to pass on the Word of God adequately.

With Our Brother Knights

Our brother Knights have so many memories of Bishop Dionne, about his simple and warm transmission of the Word of God. We remember well his fraternal explanation of the sign of the cross, and of the Mass. It is not surprising that last winter, despite horrible weather, over one hundred people showed up for a day of recollection with him. What has always fascinated me is hearing Bishop Dionne say, before a celebration or before preaching: "I don't know yet what to say to them!" I think I have his secret, here: it is simply that he lets his heart do the talking. His preaching comes from the heart. I have often asked him to say a few words to us without his knowing about it beforehand, and he never refuses. After a few introductory humorous words, he goes into a simple yet deep reflection. When I thank him after such a talk, he wonders aloud whether his words struck home.

Bravo!

The Knights of Columbus found that you had the correct words and pastoral attitude since they are giving you this Medal of Merit. I am very proud of you, and this honour reflects on your family, your friends, and the whole Church. Bravo, Bishop Dionne!

+ François Thibodeau ym

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

11-01-06