



From A Bishop's Journal (723)

How to Prepare for the Québec International Eucharistic Congress

On October 17, 2004 Pope John Paul II gave the diocese of Québec the task of organising the 49th International Eucharistic Congress. This would be, for the universal Church, an occasion to celebrate its faith in the Eucharist and to witness to the Gospel by experiencing times of prayer, reflection, and fellowship. However, it was quite a daunting task to work at this, with Québec City involved in celebrating its 400th anniversary of foundation. The Eucharistic Congress theme is *The Eucharist, God's Gift for the Life of the World*.

A Full Programme

The 49th International Eucharistic Congress will be preceded by a theological symposium from June 11 to 13. The Congress itself will begin June 15, 2008, in the afternoon, and close on Sunday, June 22, with an outdoor mass on the Plains of Abraham. Several activities will be held in the Québec Coliseum which, for the occasion, will be converted into a "Eucharistic Village," with entertainment, conferences, testimonies, and workshops. Some 15,000 are expected to join in these activities at the Coliseum. Sub-themes will be developed every day: The Eucharist, God's greatest gift; The Eucharist, Memorial of the Paschal Event; The Eucharist Builds up the Church, Sacrament of Salvation; The Eucharist, Christ's Life in Our Life; The Eucharist and the mission; Witnesses of the Eucharist in the Midst of the World. Among the invited speakers there will be the archbishops of Washington, D.C., Lyon, France, Buenos Aires, Argentina, the bishop of Imus in the Philippines, the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples, and the archbishop of Douala, Cameroun. Fifty-five cardinals have already indicated that they shall attend the event. "Outstanding" witnesses will also be present: Mr. Jean Vanier, founder of L'Arche communities, a Canadian living in France; Fr. Nicolas Buttet of Switzerland; Ms. Elisabeth Nguyen Wong, a Vietnamese woman living in Canada; Mr. José H. Prado Flores of Mexico; and Ms. Marguerite Barankitse of Ruanda. Will His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI attend? Answer to this question is expected by the end of this month. He or his legate will preside the closing Eucharist, musical entertainment, art exhibits, a procession, prayer evenings, meetings with youth and with members of the consecrated life, and the priestly ordination of at least 12 candidates, on Friday, June 20, these are some of the elements of a Congress whose aim is to gather together and energise.

Compulsory Registration

Several activities are held in a number of church in the city, and they are free of charge. However, whoever wants to participate in everything taking place in the Eucharistic Village – opening celebration, workshops, conferences, testimonies – must register. The cost is \$200 for the entire Congress if registration is made before December 30, 2007, and \$230 after that date. With the registration you receive a Congress kit of documentation, passes to the Eucharistic Village, lunch, a translator radio to listen to talks and conferences in one of the Congress's official languages: French, English, and Spanish; and shuttle service through Québec, to avoid automobile travel and parking problems. You can send your name and cheque (payable to "Diocesan Centre" with the note 2008 International Eucharistic Congress") to Ms. Jeannine Cormier, 10 rue Denis, St-Jacques, NB, E7B 1G1 (tel.: 735-8577). You will have to look after your own transportation from Edmundston to your lodgings in Québec, though, unless we can group together the registrations before February 1, 2008. Hotels and religious institutions have already been "taken by storm," in Québec City, and host families are also offering lodging for those attending the Congress. According to indications given by those interested in going, the closeness of Edmundston to Québec City could allow for one- or two-day charter-bus transportation, especially for the June 20 to 22 weekend. This is an international event that we have never attended before, and since it takes place only every four years, it may be that there be several decades passing before such a congress is held in Canada. The Congress organisers hope to have at least two representatives from every parish in Canada... The people of the Rouyn-Noranda diocese in Québec have already chartered two buses for the Congress.

Spiritual Preparation

As I think back on the five eucharistic congresses we held in our diocese in preparation for the year 2000 Jubilee – in the Restigouche, Southern Victoria, Upper Madawaska, Grand Falls, and Edmundston – I believe that one of the major causes of the unexpected success of their activities was the intense prayer of all the faithful: family prayer, prayer in church, at home, in senior citizens' homes, etc. And the same will be happening, for the Québec International Eucharistic Congress. Without prayer, this congress cannot succeed. This is why, as early as October, 2004, there appeared a prayer for the Congress, and for the 100 preparatory days, prayer has always had first place. Whether you attend the Eucharistic Congress or not, I urge you all to fervently pray the Lord: a prayer of thanksgiving for the wondrous gift of the Eucharist, prayer that all those who come to the Eucharist live more and more as disciples of Christ, prayer for all those who will be taking communion for the first time, that they always have this desire for the Lord, prayer for all those who have distanced themselves from our Sunday gatherings, that they rediscover the richness of the Lord's Day, of his Word, and the powerful signs of hope and charity to be found in every eucharistic gesture.

Theme Song: *Gift of God*

I invite you to reflect on the Congress theme song composed by Robert Lebel: "O God source of life, we thank you for your gift: this bread and wine for the life of the world. United in praise, we come to the feast to take in our hands God's gift of life. For this we praise you, Lord. Behold the gifts which earth has given and human hands have made. No greater sign is there among us: life-giving

bread and wine. Behold the bread that now is broken; see the body of Christ. See in the cup of our salvation the blood of Christ out-poured. Engraved upon our hearts and minds, this wondrous memory! We come rejoicing to this table, the banquet of the Lord! Now let us celebrate the myst'ry, Christ's presence made anew: do not our hearts burn when we hear him and when we break the Bread?" Have a wonderful Congress!

+ François Thibodeau ym

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

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