



From A Bishop's Journal (729)

Jesus has taste: he visits us!

I offer you my best wishes of peace, joy, and health, on the occasion of Christmas and the New Year. May these days be, for you and yours, unforgettable moments lived in simplicity, love, fellowship, forgiveness, and solidarity.

June 15-22, 2008

As we approach the Québec City International Eucharistic Congress, it is good to repeat that in the garden of God there is much happiness because we can sustain ourselves with the Eucharist. If we were to rediscover the immense richness of a Mass we would joyfully attend it every Sunday. Following these Eucharistic celebrations we would display an air of resurrection, mercy, and joy. The Emmanuel we celebrate on this Christmas day continues to be with us until the end of time.

He has taste!

From time everlasting, the Lord's will was to make of this part of our world a place where he would be pleased to abide. We can really say that Jesus has taste! Not only did he want to come to Palestine some 2007 years ago, but he has been with us in the Madawaska region for over 200 years, in Victoria County over 140 years, and in the Restigouche over 100 years. He has been in Québec for 400 years, and for some 125 years he has inhabited my native village of Saint-Odilon, Québec, which we shall celebrate next July. In a wonderful landscape, in the midst of the natural beauty we delight in contemplating, and for which we thank him daily, God confronts us directly with the great mystery of the Incarnation. Jesus' will was to remain with us: he is truly Emmanuel, God-with-us. And he never tires telling us: "And know that I am with you always, even to the end of time." We who have been called by God, summoned by God, gathered together by God, we who have been baptised and confirmed, together we form the Body of Christ.

Discerning Jesus in the Assembly and the Word

If we cannot discern Jesus in the assembly of brothers and sisters that we form, how could we recognise him in the consecrated bread and wine? It is this same faith in Jesus which makes it possible to recognise him in the assembly gathered and the Eucharist offered. We are not just

anybody, anything, but without any merit on our part we are the Body of Christ. A Christian community must be open to all, young and old; everyone has a place in this assembly: Jesus came to give his life for humankind. After having been welcomed as members of the Body of Christ, we are now ready to welcome the word of God. For us disciples of Jesus, this Word is important because it shed light on our lives and is a source of hope. That is why, at Masses and word liturgies, the Word is not proclaimed any old way. We listen to it as we listen to the words of someone who is dear to us. We are invited to welcome this Word of God and to respond to it, we are invited to apply it to our lives because it is the Word of God, the Word that was made man for us.

Along Our Paths

It is so very important to listen to this word of God! You recall Jesus' long march with his disciples on the road to Emmaus. To his sad and discouraged disciples, Jesus takes time to explain the Scriptures and open it to them. Did he not have to suffer all he went through so as to enter into glory? Jesus explains the Scriptures to them so well that their hearts burn in them. However, Jesus was not always that successful in his teaching, and this can be an encouragement to our preachers, parents, and religious educators: When Jesus started explaining to his disciples that he was the Bread of Life, his group of listeners was cut down to hardly a dozen; we would say today that the church emptied to the point where Jesus asked his companions, "Do you want to leave me, too?" Peter answered: "To whom would we go? You have the words of everlasting life!" If Christmas and the Eucharistic Congress helped us rediscover that only Jesus has the words of eternal life, perhaps our attachment to him and to his Church would be even more tangible. How I wish that the wonder of Emmaus would be repeated for all who listen to the Word of God: May it touch their hearts, warm them, and move them according to the heart of Jesus. When we participate in a liturgy of the Word, may we truly welcome Jesus, the Word of God, the Word made man. It is he who comes again to warm our hearts.

The Marvel before Our Eyes

At each Eucharistic celebration the bread and wine become, through the action of the Spirit, the body and blood of Jesus. It is the great mystery of Jesus' love, the marvel he has brought us. "Whoever eats my body and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I shall raise him up on the last day. My body is real food and my blood is real drink." The living bread, the bread of life is offered to us as the object of our praise. Let us therefore praise him with resounding voices, full of the joy of our hearts!

Let us Show Forth the Body of Christ

Priests have an extraordinary ministry: they are charged with doing Eucharist and with revealing to our communities that they form the Body of Christ. The religious brothers and sisters are charged with revealing the fellowship we have in Jesus our Saviour, of revealing Jesus in his poverty, obedience, and chastity. Our brothers and sisters who are joined together in the bonds of matrimony are given an outstanding mission: through their love every day, they reveal to the world God's love

for His people. We who have been baptised, confirmed, and nourished with the Eucharist, are invited, on the occasion of Christmas and the International Eucharistic Congress, to renew our commitment to witness by our whole lives – especially to our most needy brothers and sisters – to the presence of the risen Jesus in the midst of the world. Yes, Jesus really has taste! He comes to reside at the very core of our hearts.

With all my love and blessing.

+ François Thibodeau

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