



From A Bishop's Journal (734)

The Beautiful Mission of Preparing Children for Their First Communion

Since the year 2008 will be a highlight of the universal Church and especially of all the Churches in Canada on the occasion of the 49th International Eucharistic Congress to be held in Québec City from June 15 to 22, with the grace of God I shall publish my fourteenth pastoral letter for Pentecost, this time on the sacrament of the Eucharist. For several years now my letter has included brief testimonies from the faithful of the diocese, they who are the first concerned by the topic considered. Because of their rootedness in the very heart of life, their simplicity, their solidity, and their briefness, these testimonies are true riches for us.

Requests to Catechists

Enriched by these wonderful experiences, last October I asked those responsible for the preparation of our children for First Communion to write a brief testimony on how they plan to live this experience with the children: “ – *What do you do, what do you say to the children, to give them the desire to receive the Eucharist? – How do you go about passing on this great mystery of our faith to the children of today? – In your experience, what is the determining and most interesting aspect of life that helps us better receive the wonderful gift that can still be ours today?*” I have already received several answers to these questions, but I would like to share two of them with you, with the hope that others, too – parents, pastors, or catechists – will tell me their “secrets” for a good preparation for First Communion.

“Nothing as Cool as This!”

Martine the catechist overflows with enthusiasm when she writes: “As the facilitator for Level 3, for Grade 3, it had never dawned on me that I could ever be so taken up with facilitating a catechetics session! A secondary school teacher to the very depth of me, I have always been passionate about teaching the youth and with giving them the best possible tools to help them succeed in school, and for their welfare. But now I can look on an experience I have had with children aged 7 and 8, and there is nothing as “cool” as this! First of all, the fact of being able to talk to all these little faces filled with enthusiasm, concerned with knowing about the words of Jesus, excites me! Their playful, spontaneous comments make our get-togethers lively. There is nothing more real, and the opportunity of spending quality time with these small unsophisticated beings who are full of

goodness , fills me with happiness. They are a priceless gift to catechists... In order to involve them actively in the group, the participation of the main actors is required. This is why we have them do colourful mimes and sketches on the exciting stories that are in our programme. Through all these fascinating exchanges between students and their facilitator, through the exciting projects and challenging discoveries, we give these children the desire to surpass themselves, enrich their knowledge, and desire to receive the Eucharist in love and faith.”

Remembered Forever

And Martine continues: “The fact of looking forward to being with them at these special times adds a touch of magic and, through our example, the children love and want to come and share with us. They are so excited about coming to these gatherings, that at the very moment the magic comes, we have the certainty that we have attained our end. We are all bound by love, and it is through activities that captivate them that we urge them to welcome the mystery of faith, the Word of God, and to love the earth as Jesus did: all of these are treasures hidden in their hearts forever. Together we do make a difference! Is there any other gift more beautiful than loving one another in faith, while enjoying oneself?”

Wonderful God!

“To give to the young a taste for communion, I tell them that the Eucharist is the Bread of life that God gives the world, and that it is a privilege for us to be able to receive it at church. This bread nourishes our spirit and helps us be Christians following in the footsteps of Jesus. In order to pass on this message to the children, I tell them that we are not pure spirits and that we need visible signs of God’s presence, and that Jesus came for this: to make God present. Bread is one of the daily elements of life, and it serves as an excellent symbol. It is wonderful to have a God who makes himself close to us in our material needs to turn this bread into a spiritual food. In order to be ready to take communion, it is important to be welcoming, to be open, and to have faith. It is like getting a gift: We must know how to look at it, use it, and say thank you. We must wish it, have an open heart, and appreciate it. When we receive the Bread of life, it continues its work in us. So, if I really had God’s gift I would not hesitate and I would receive communion every Sunday.” These words from Catechist Louise do us good: they rejuvenate our hearts to help us relate better to the great sign of God’s love for all humankind.

Do Not Hesitate to Contact Me

These testimonies I have shared with you are like a “scoop” on the pastoral letter that I shall be publishing Pentecost Sunday, May 11. If there are parents or catechists who want to share with me how they go about giving their children a desire for the Eucharist, do not hesitate writing to me. May this very simple prayer arise in us: “Keep my soul in peace, near to you, my God. O Lord, my heart is not proud, nor are my eyes haughty; I busy not myself with great things, nor with things too sublime for me. Rather, I have stilled and quieted my soul like a child resting on its mother’s lap. O Israel, hope in the Lord, both now and forever.” These words from Psalm 131 have called on

millions and millions of believers to welcome in their hearts our God who desires to be so close to us. The same idea is expressed in these words of Psalm 8: "How great is your name, O Lord our God, through all the earth!"

+ François Thibodeau *gm*

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

01-30-08