



## **From A Bishop's Journal (752)**

### **Towards a New Pastoral Priority**

**T**he 2006 Pastoral Orientation Congress was held “in view of a new evangelisation.” The 84 recommendations that were submitted to me at the time specified this new endeavour. They were recommendations regarding changes in the Church, family- and parish-based catechetics, adult faith education, baptism preparation ministry, pastoral formation, prayer and celebration, commitment and fellowship, ministry to the sick, youth and family ministry, the ordained ministries, pastoral restructuring, parish committees, and even the financial aspects of diocesan life. Their only aim was to bring their contribution to the new evangelisation in our milieu. It was in this perspective that all the proposals made at the Edmundston Diocesan Synod (1987-1990), the work sessions and committee meetings were studied.

#### **Proposal 78**

“That consideration be given to organising a diocesan evangelisation campaign, following the financial campaign now taking place, and that it be professionally organised and structured by people competent in the matters.” If there was an element of surprise in 2005-2006 regarding Proposal 78 when it was submitted to me, it now seems to tie in well with everything we have initiated together in preceding years: the creation of the École de la Foi, the establishing of parish and diocesan structures and of parish- and family-based catechetics, the creation of youth and family ministry teams, and the beginning of an office of social affairs. What is new, however, is not “evangelisation,” but the campaign itself. The Diocesan Pastoral Council chose instead the expression “meeting Jesus on my path,” since we must be aware that we benefit from “an extraordinary evangelical heritage.” I am reminded of the theme chosen by the committee that prepared the celebrations for the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Immaculate Conception parish, “125 Years of Heritage and Faith.” We only have to read the souvenir album to learn about all of these gestures of faith that were made by the pioneers for the sake of their families and parish, in their lives on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis. Even before the founding of the first parish in the Madawaska region, the missionaries and families intensely lived the Gospel of Christ; here again we see the influence of Blanche Thibodeau as she looked after people dying of starvation and neglect, a service that had its source in the charity of Christ who directed her to the poorest and neediest and most suffering. It is important for us to look to our past, to find there traces of the first evangelisation. In doing so we would be surprised, since the Gospel was first brought by convinced lay people, humble people who were firmly attached to Christ and his Church, and who constantly supported one another

through personal and community prayer, and passing on their religious values, supported in all this by missionary priests who came for their spiritual needs, we are justly proud of our predecessors (lay people, religious brothers and sisters, priests and bishops) we created schools, colleges, a university, hospitals, social services and more, for their brothers and sisters. This was – and still is – an expression of their faith and charity.

### **Mission of the Church**

In his Apostolic Exhortation on Evangelisation in the Modern World, Pope Paul VI (1963-1978) writes that “evangelizing is the vocation proper to the Church,” that the Church “exists in order to evangelize.” In all the upheavals faced by the world and the Church today, Good News must be brought to all our brothers and sisters without exception. Jesus is at the heart of our lives, so we must go to him, acknowledge him, follow him, and proclaim him. This is what evangelising is all about, this is the Good News that gives meaning to our lives. The times we live in is a period of grace for the Church, and our projects must be more and more focussed on this missionary context by reaching out to others without proselytising, reaching out to our brothers and sisters who have distanced themselves from our parish gatherings, or those who do not longer share our values. When Pope John Paul II speaks about a new evangelisation, he makes it clear that it is new in its methods and scope.

### **“With the Gospel of Christ”**

In his second letter to the Corinthians, Saint Paul places us in the context of evangelisation. He puts all his zeal and energy into this: he has been “seized” by Christ, and nothing can ever separate him from the love of Christ; as Robert Lebel sings: “neither death nor life, nor heat nor cold, neither day nor night, or hunger and thirst, neither chains nor threats; neither hell nor fear, nor peril or danger, nor evils nor tears, nor the present nor the past, nor angels or powers.» In verse 14 of chapter 2, Paul shows us the secret of his strength and zeal: “With the Gospel of Christ.” Having become a “disciple of Christ,” Saint Paul welcomed his message. Jesus reveals the kindness of God. Paul meditated fully on the mission of Jesus as he expressed it in the synagogue at Nazareth: “The spirit of the Lord is upon me; therefore he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind and release to prisoners, to announce a year of favour from the Lord” (Luke 4:18).

### **May This Priority of Evangelisation be Activated!**

I applaud the implementation of the new pastoral priority that will be experienced with the humility and daring of a disciple of Christ. A “publicity” campaign would soon become irrelevant and superficial because we have nothing to sell; however, we have a person to introduce, and what a person; a message to give, and what a message; a community to revitalise, a whole network of poor and excluded to go to; and a vast group of people yearning for justice and peace to satisfy. We shall often have to mediate on the parable of the seed, the parable of the net, the parable of the wheat and chaff. “With the Gospel of Christ” we have to be once again people who welcome the mystery of God in our lives and who proclaim the greatness of the divine plan. “With the Gospel of Christ” we shall have to implicate ourselves in forming leaders for our communities. “With the Gospel of

Christ” we have to build missionary communities that reach out to the poor, the suffering, and the marginalised. Let us not let this period of grace pass us by, it is too precious a gift for us, and for the future of our people.

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