



From A Bishop's Journal (766)

The Canadian General Elections (2)

In the preceding article on the electoral campaign, I wrote a pastoral reflection on the eventual challenges put forth by an electoral campaign. Going back to Pope John Paul II, I wanted to remind all the parties of to give preferential priority to the poor by passing the most appropriate legislation for the life and survival of the poorest among us. I also recalled the urgent calls of the bishops to the leaders of the G-8 countries, to keep their commitments. I pointed out the disturbing exodus of our people – young people and older ones – towards the South and the western provinces, and the difficulties that exist in the forest industry, the fisheries, and agriculture.

Starting with the Poor

As I write these two articles on the forthcoming elections, Cardinal Renato Martino, president of the Pontifical Council on Justice and Peace, states once again that according to the Church's social teaching, that extreme poverty has first of all the features of women and children. The dynamism of evangelization "must drive the Church to privilege the poor, to direct our strength to the poor, to consider the renewal of society from the needs of the poor," and to "turn our powers and resources towards the poor, and to consider the organization and structure of society so that a neighbour does not have to live in misery." As a matter of fact, it is a topsy-turvy world that is being offered to us: to be and live with the poor makes all the difference, compared with laboratory-developed programmes. We must build a new society with the poorest of the poor as a starting point: this is a demanding revolution, but it is so noble for the future of every man, woman, and child.

Looking Back to the Years 300-400

When I met Pope John Paul II in Rome, in September, 1999 I told him I grateful I was for the important homily he gave in Moncton, on social justice. He answered: "It was on September 13, on the feast of St. John Chrysostom." I wondered: For a man who had given an untold number of talks and homilies, how could he remember that particular homily, fifteen years later? I believe that it is due to the fact that it contains a whole action programme on behalf of the underprivileged. "You want to honour the Body of Christ," Saint John Chrysostom (349-404) said, "do not despise him when you see him naked. Don't honour him here in church with silk hangings you'll you leave him outside suffering from cold and nakedness. Because the one who said: 'This is my body,' and who

made it so by saying it, he is the one who also said: 'I was hungry and you did not feed me,' and 'Each time you have not done it to the least of these my children, you have not done it to me...' Start by feeding the hungry and with the leftovers, decorate your altar. You have a golden cup, and you would not give a glass of water. What good is it to decorate the Lord's table with gold-embroidered coverings, if you do not give him the blanket he needs?... Remember, too, that it is Christ who struggles on, a homeless stranger; you do not even want to see that he is in chains, in prison." These words were very much like those of Saint Basil (330-379): "Your bread belongs to the starving, and the money you waste belongs to the poor." Such words, rooted as they are in the Gospels, stimulated the zeal of some and the anger of others, just as today. Just think of the reactions we see to the suggestion of raising the minimum wage, or against family allowances to those on social welfare.

Homily of September 13, 1984

Pope John Paul continued: "John Chrysostom had no fear of wicked judgements, irritations and persecutions. He continued to firmly proclaim the Gospel requirements through fidelity to Christ and charity towards those whose conversion he desired... I know that the community spirit has already helped you overcome many problems in Acadia, at the beginning; even today, you are regarded as models of fraternity, cordial hospitality, and sharing. Your region, however, like many others, is undergoing a profound transformation, and this is a new test; urban life has grown, an economic crisis has struck local communities, along with a spiritual crisis, a crisis of values. You can still quietly look to the future if you remain steadfast in your faith in the Risen Christ, if you let his Spirit raise in you responses to new challenges, if you show solidarity with one another, and if you accept to be leaven in the Church and society... It is obvious that a faith that is well understood brings forth all the charitable commitments that the Patriarch of Constantinople mentioned, which today could be called: respect of others, of their freedom and dignity so that they are not crushed under new social constraints; respect for the human rights according to the charters we know today: right to life from the moment of conception, right to one's reputation, right to development, right to freedom of conscience, refusal of violence and torture, considered for the poor, the women, the workers, the unemployed, the immigrants; adoption of social measures for greater equality and justice for all men and women, above individual interests or privileges; voluntary simplicity of life and sharing, as opposed to the actual thirst for profit, consumption, and artificial satisfactions. In this way, without depriving oneself of one's basic needs, we must allow the poor, whoever they may be, to have a life of dignity."

Growth

Many other subjects could be raised, in this pastoral reflection on the coming elections: the closing of mills and regional airports, access to government services, the requirements of a healthy democracy, the functioning of a good parliament, honesty in interpersonal and intergovernmental relationships, the role of the media in promoting respect for individuals and groups, especially at election time, monopolies of all kinds, etc. However, I believe that I have pointed out the most vital questions: a preferential option for the young, economic growth, the family, and the environment. May the 2008 campaign help us grow as individuals and as a people! May the prayer of the whole

for our leaders be granted: “Eternal and almighty God, you hold in your hands the hearts of all your children, you guarantee the rights of all peoples. Help those in power so that, throughout the earth security and peace, the prosperity of nations, and religious freedom be strengthened through your grace.”

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