



From A Bishop's Journal (788)

His Love Is from Age to Age

Final Message of Bishop François Thibodeau, C.J.M.

My First and My Last Messages

As bishop-elect, on November 1, 1993 I met with all the priests of the Diocese of Edmundston and gave my first press conference. It was then that I announced my episcopal motto: *His love is from age to age*, and I explained its meaning. A few weeks later at my episcopal ordination on January 9, 1994, in my closing address I repeated the same message and urged all present, bishops, priests, parents, politicians, every baptised and confirmed, to proclaim this message of hope, at the end of that century. It is good to be told, in a world often marked by violence, poverty, and despair, that God loves us. This was the Apostle John's central message, continuously repeated: "Love one another as I have loved you." This was also the central message of Saint John Eudes, as he introduced the liturgical devotion of the Hearts of Jesus and Mary. I would like you to retain of my years among you the deepest conviction that was mine, that *His love is from age to age*. Besides, one of my pastoral publications bears this title.

"To Live with the Heart"

As my mission among you comes to a close, I want to express my deepest gratitude to all those who, in word and in deed, have helped me feel God's love. I must thank in a special way Bishop Gerard Dionne who was not only a personal friend and brother, but a true father to me: his love of the Gospel, the Church, and his brothers and sisters helped me find, in the grace of God, the strength to carry out my demanding mission. I thank all my brother priests: from my very first "Journal" offering, I told you of the special love I have for you, and I have always marvelled at your deep faith and your availability. Despite the necessary, rapid changes, you shared with me how you lived your vocation and mission. I admire the indispensable work you do through your prayer, your ministry, and the offering of your whole life. I thank our seminarian and I pray that many other seminarians join him. May they proclaim together the Lord's eternal love. May our great evangelisation project develop under the loving gaze of the Virgin Mary. I thank all the pastoral agents and the parish pastoral teams: Your availability and generosity have given life to our beloved Church, and helped her go through the pastoral restructuring without undue tensions. I thank all the religious sisters:

Your consecrated life is an expression of the infinite love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. You have dedicated your whole lives to the Blessed Trinity, and you live under the sign of communion. I thank the religious brothers I have met, on my journey: your lives are kindled with this divine love. I thank all our elders: You are really a treasure to our society and our Church: We need you, to remind us of God's kindness to us. I thank all the parents: Your mission is among the most demanding in our world: As spouses, you express to one another a deeper and deeper love; as mothers and fathers, you show your children an unshakeable love. I want to tell the youth of my deep affection for them: Thanks to God, I gave you the greatest of all gifts, the Gift of the Spirit: May he always abide in you. To all the children I say: You are the "springtime of the Church." To all the poor, the unemployed, the sick; to all the sick and the grieving, I want to express my admiration for your courage in the midst of difficulties. I am sure that, as with the disciples of Emmaus, the Risen One walks at your side. To all the presbyterium, especially those priests I had the joy to ordain, to the members of the Bishop's Council, the members of the diocesan services, the members of all the Councils, commissions, and diocesan committees, to those in social communications, I repeat my gratitude to you. To all the faithful of the diocese, I give my friendship and my prayer: I have wanted, day by day, to tell you of God's wonderful love. To my Eudist family, the members of the Thibodeau family, and the people of Saint-Odilon: My love for you and my solidarity with you remain for ever.

Forgiveness

In all humility and truth I ask forgiveness to all those I may have hurt, through the years. I ask them for marks of kindness, forgiveness, and mercy. In his hymn to love, Saint Paul says that love is not prone to anger, does not brood over injuries, does not rejoice in what is wrong, but rejoices in the truth; there is no limit to its forbearance, to its trust, its hope, its power to endure: Such has been my love for you. Forgive all the bad I may have done to you or the sadness I caused you, in word and deed. Be assured, in return, that I earnestly forgive all who have offended me or who could have hurt me.

Acts of Love

Convinced that the Christian life is a continuation of the life of Jesus, that our life on earth cannot be destroyed but is transformed by passing from life on earth to heavenly life, I surrender completely to the Lord. Here is an excerpt of Saint John Eudes' thirty-fourth act of love, from his wonderful book, *Le Royaume de Jésus* ("The Kingdom of Jesus"): "Amen, come, O Lord Jesus, come, my life and my light, come, my love, come, my all, come into me to destroy all that is opposed to your love. Come transform me entirely into love of you. Come to me, to draw me to you, and to set me sooner into this place of love where lies the true and perfect love, where everything is love, where there is nothing but pure love and continuous, invariable, and everlasting love. O Jesus, O Jesus, only love of my heart!"

A Final Song

I want to repeat with you, here, the song I had composed for my episcopal ordination, it describes my sense of wonder at the love of our God: "God the Father has done great things / He gives us earth, sun and the sky. / He gives us forests, oceans and soil / To plant his seeds of love. / God the

Son has done great things / he gives a meaning to our lives. / He became poor among all the poor,
/ He lives among us now. / God the Spirit has done great things / He comes to change the human
heart / He comes to build a new world for us / Creation of his kingdom. / And if love has done great
things / Long live his love, long live our God! / He comes to live deep in our hearts, / he comes to
change the world. / How great are the works of the Lord / Shout out with joy, 'Our God is living!'
/ His love is from age to age, Alleluia!"

+ François Thibodeau *jm*

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Bishop of Edmundston (1994-2009)

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