



Excerpts from a Conference of Bishop Claude Champagne, O.M.I.

The New Evangelization (2)

Last October, Bishop Claude Champagne, O.M.I., the new Bishop of Edmundston, launched our 2008-2009 pastoral year at the Diocesan Centre by helping us deepen our understanding of the new evangelization, and telling us of the presence of the Spirit and the coming of the Kingdom.

Richness of the Kingdom of God

The following are among the important elements: His welcoming and re-integration of all the marginalized of his society: the poor, sinners, publicans, Samaritans, foreigners, women. Jesus made it possible for each of them to find their place in the community. Jesus' life of prayer which reveals to us a God of mercy and love, a God who has not forgotten humans but calls them to enter into communion with him. Jesus' attitude to the Law is also important: although Jesus is a faithful observer of the Law, it is not an absolute in his eyes. The only absolute is God who is Love, mercy and pardon. His preaching is not so much an announcement of punishment, judgment or retribution, but more often a message of pardon and mercy. The healings and exorcisms that Jesus performed are presented as signs of the presence of the Reign of God among us. These help us understand that this Reign affects human beings in all their dimensions: spiritual, psychological, physical. We are no longer able to talk exclusively about the salvation of the soul. Jesus also changed the type of relationships that exist among the members of the community. They are no longer individuals who dominate or who are dominated, but brothers and sisters, ready to place themselves at each other's service, ready to give their lives so that the others may live. Jesus, a free man, invites us to experience inner freedom. All of these elements together help us understand the riches of the Reign of God inaugurated by Jesus. It means that Jesus came to struggle against all forms of evil that are obstacles to the full human life that God desires for all his children. It is he who inaugurates this Reign in his mystery of death-resurrection and who, after his resurrection, continues his mission of introducing the Reign of God and preparing humanity for the plenitude of the Reign offered by the Father to the end of time.

The New Evangelization

In his missionary encyclical, Pope John Paul II emphasized that we are facing three different pastoral and missionary situations: The mission *ad gentes* for those who have not yet known Christ and his Gospel. In our country there are many who profess no religion or belong to other religious traditions.

Recent immigration has notably increased the number of persons meeting this definition. Christian communities in which the Church's pastoral activity is carried out. We will return to these groups when discussing the new agents of the "new evangelization". Baptized persons who have lost the sense of living faith and no longer even consider themselves as members of the Church, leading a life separated from Christ and his Gospel. The Pope added that we must not create barriers or a rigid compartmentalization among these different groups. It is in this context that we address the issue of the "new evangelization", new through its agents, through its methods, through its ardour. The "new evangelization" is not new because we are announcing a Gospel that is different from the one we have proclaimed since Pentecost, or another Christ, even though current theology provides us with an understanding that is somewhat different from the one that animated our missionary efforts in the past.

New Through Its Methods

New through its methods: Today of course, we understand our mission in the light of this Reign of God inaugurated by Jesus. The reality of "sacrament" already used in *Lumen Gentium* to speak about the Church, the universal sacrament of salvation, helps us in our reflection. The sacrament includes the values of "sign" and "instrument". Today we prefer to use the concepts of "symbol" and "artisan" to designate persons, members of the Church, as the "symbols" and "artisans" of the Reign of God inaugurated by Jesus. Evangelizers are sent to be "symbols" of this God who comes in Jesus Christ, making visible his action in our world. We are therefore referred to all the values of the Reign of God already present in Jesus' mission: dialogue, human promotion, commitment to justice and peace, education, care of the sick, aid to the poor and to children, freedom, pardon, love, respect for others, with the affirmation of the priority of transcendence and spirituality. Insofar as we are witnesses of this unconditional free love of God revealed in Jesus Christ, we become "symbols", we make visible this Spirit of the Risen Lord at work in our world. When we promote the values of the Reign of God present in so many of our brothers and sisters, we become artisans of this Reign. This free love implies the service of the Reign of God at work in the heart of each person.

Going toward...

How can we, in our present world, be both "symbol" and "artisan" of this Reign? We must first cover the psychological and sociological distances that separate us from those to whom we are sent, conscious that this passage is a challenge, a death to things familiar to us in the Church, to open us to a new world, to new realities. When the Holy Spirit urged the disciples to go toward a new world, a death was always involved. This is what is known as "going toward the other", "making oneself present to the other" to manifest God's love to them, to love them unconditionally, freely, without seeking to win them over for our own collective interest in order to increase the number of faithful in our Church.