



PASTORAL LETTER

MARIAN YEAR

1987-1988



Dear priests, brothers and sisters:

On New Year's Day, our Holy Father announced plans for a Marian Year. This year will help deepen our understanding of Mary's place in the mystery of Christ and his Church. It was inaugurated on Pentecost, Sunday, June 7, and will continue until the feast of the Assumption, August 15, 1988. With my brother bishops in this country, I heartily welcome the Holy Father's initiative and invite everyone in the diocese of Edmundston to take an active part in this special time of grace.

This Marian Year is, in the mind of the Holy Father, the best way to prepare the world for a major celebration of the year 2000. This will be a special effort to remember the birth of Jesus Christ as the supreme grace, « the greatest work accomplished by the Holy Spirit in the history of creation and salvation ». To help us prepare for this event, the Holy Father invites us to turn towards Mary. She played a unique role in the Incarnation of the Son of God, in the beginning of a new era for humanity.

The thirteen years separating us from the year 2000 will be a time of advent, that is, a time of prayerful expectation and preparation. Mary is our best guide to help us in this preparation and in our reflection on the mystery of Christ. It is for this very reason that the Pope has proclaimed this Marian Year. As mother of Christ, she becomes mother of us all. At the same time, she is our sister in humanity and in our faith in her Son, Jesus.

On March 25, the Holy Father published an encyclical, « Mother of the Redeemer ». This document provides the main teaching resource for our spiritual life and pastoral action during the Marian Year. In his encyclical, John Paul II places particular emphasis on Mary's « pilgrimage of faith ». Through her two-fold special relationship with Christ and with his Church, her « personal journey of faith » becomes a basic and ongoing guide for every Christian.

Inspired by the teaching of the Scriptures, the Holy Father helps us to follow Mary's journey of faith from the Annunciation to the Cross. Mary was with Jesus at all major moments of his life. She also was in the Upper Room when the Holy Spirit descended on the Apostles. Mary's faith had great influence on the early Christians as, from the very beginning, they regarded Jesus in the light of her faith and celebrated her special witness. In their New Testament writings, the Apostles give witness to this presence of Mary in the infant Church. Moreover, Mary continues to accompany the Church throughout the history of humanity, as its model.

In his encyclical, John Paul II invites us to promote « a new and more careful reading of what the Council said about the Blessed Virgin Mary » (RM, 48). At a time when there are so many different forms of devotion and theological reflection about Mary that have not been officially approved by the Church, it is important to rely with confidence on the Pope's authoritative teaching. As he says, Marian spirituality and devotion have their source and inspiration in the Bible.

As a way to better celebrate this special year, I invite my brother priests to speak during the Marian Year about Mary's place in the mystery of Christ and his Church.

Although each parish and family is free to underline this time of prayer as one wishes, I suggest that in all churches and chapels, a statue or image of Our Lady be permanently decorated with flowers and lights; that the feasts in honour of Mary be celebrated with a certain solemnity; that the rosary and the Memorare be prayed daily in families and homes, and the Angelus recited where possible.

May we all develop a true and solid devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary. May she protect our local Church during the entire diocesan Synod, as she watched over the Church at its beginning, from the day of Pentecost onward.

With my special blessing,

+ Gérard Dionne
Bishop of Edmundston

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