
« INAUGURAL ADDRESS »



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9 January 1994
Day of my Episcopal Ordination

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today the Word of the Lord is being fulfilled in our hearing:

« The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. »

ETERNAL LOVE

As we come to the conclusion of the solemn celebration we have shared together, we can proclaim loud and clear that God's love is everlasting; the divine love has been shown today especially to the Church of Edmundston. We are the beloved sons and daughters of God the Father, in Jesus Christ the Liberator. The Holy Spirit is upon us.

On this ninth day of January, 1994, the kindness of God for His people once again breaks out. In His infinite generosity He desires all the baptised to share in the mission of His beloved Son Jesus Christ whose baptism in the River Jordan we celebrate today: a priestly, prophetic, and royal mission. A common mission unites us:

that of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus and of making disciples. Thanks to the Holy Spirit, our one communion prompts us to serve the Gospel and our brothers and sisters.

As fifth bishop of Edmundston I want to respond wholeheartedly to the will of the Lord who shows me such incredible kindness. I am a bishop to serve my brothers and sisters in the name of Jesus, to witness to God everywhere, to praise Him day after day on behalf of the Church, and to help bring about a kingdom of happiness, holiness, justice, and peace.

GRATITUDE TO THE HOLY FATHER

I want to express my gratitude to His Holiness Pope John Paul II for the regard he has for the Church of Edmundston; I want to reiterate my attachment to him and my prayers for him. And I ask his representative in our country, His Grace Archbishop Carlo Curis who so graciously honours us with his presence today and whose words deeply move me, to transmit to the Holy Father my gratitude and that of the entire Church of Edmundston. Through his apostolic ministry, the Holy Father shows forth God's eternal love. At the beginning of the year 1994, the Church of Edmundston wishes him many happy years, that he may bring his universal ministry to fruition and that, like the Apostle Peter before him, he not cease to confirm us in faith, hope, and love.

I want to repeat here the words of the Holy Father at his installation as pope: « Do not be afraid! Open, open wide the doors to Christ! Open the frontiers of states, economic and political systems, the vast areas of culture, civilisation, and development to his saving power! Do not be afraid! Christ knows what is in the human soul! And he alone knows! »

GRATITUDE TO THE BISHOPS

Bishop Gérard Dionne, I thank you for having accepted to ordain me bishop, indicating in this manner the episcopal continuity of the Edmundston See. It is an honour for me to be your successor, as well as a great challenge. Please be assured that I shall do all I can to ensure that the seed you have sown, especially the School of Faith and the 1987-1991 Diocesan Synod, continue to bear fruit. May this new period of grace which is unfolding before you bring you the fullness of joy and of contemplation of the Lord's wondrous works. On behalf of everyone in the diocese I express to you, Bishop Dionne, a profound indebtedness for what you have accomplished these last ten years in Edmundston.

Dear Metropolitan Archbishop Donat Chiasson, I thank you for your friendship and your presence. Thank you for having pointed the way to episcopal ministry by word and example. Your commitment to the most needy is a sign of the Lord's love which motivates me to carry on his work. As Archbishop of Moncton you will always be a reminder that the universal Church is composed of each particular Church which we form, and that narrow ties of communion and solidarity bind us to one another.

Dear Bishop Fernand Lacroix, dear beloved confrere, it is hard for me to express in words all the ties that have bound us to one another over our lifetimes. It was in September of 1961, when you were appointed superior of the Eudist Scolasticate that I first met you. You were the one who guided my immediate preparation for priestly ordination. You were superior general of the Eudist Congregation for four years. For thirteen years you were the bishop of Edmundston, and our people have fond memories of their third bishop... We had been living together at Charlesbourg for a few years, until the recent events which have brought me here. I wish you excellent health and I hope to share your love of Jesus and his Church, and your zeal in proclaiming the Word of God.

I want to express my deep gratitude to all my brother bishops of the Atlantic Region for their friendship, prayers, and solidarity. The visit to Rome we made together last November and your presence here today are real incentives for the pastoral work we are asked to do for the life of our Christian communities and the appropriate formation of shepherds and of pastoral agents of our respective communities.

To my brothers Canadian bishops who are represented here by Archbishop Francis Spence of Kingston, vice president of the Canadian Bishops' Conference, and to my Eudist brother Bishop from France Msgr. Clément Guillon of Quimper and Léon, I want to say how your presence here and your prayers are so deeply appreciated. They are a strong sign that together we are part of the one college of bishops. I am filled with gratitude for this marvellous unity. Together we are called to serve the Church with love and generosity, trust and mercy. « Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with his own blood. »

GRATITUDE TO THE PEOPLE OF QUÉBEC

Despite the bad weather, many people have come from the Québec region, and it is with great joy that I note your presence among us, today, a witness to the many years spent in the venerable Church of Québec, where I was baptised, confirmed, and ordained to the priesthood; it is within that Church that I carried out most of my ministry. I remember the ties which will forever bind me to the priests, religious, and lay people of the diocese. It was a unique grace for me to serve the Church of Québec. I pray that its Synod now being held will produce much fruit.

GRATITUDE TO THE PEOPLE OF NEW BRUNSWICK

To the people of New Brunswick, to my brothers and sisters of the Edmundston Diocesan Church I want to proclaim day after day God's everlasting love for them .

Your Excellency the Lieutenant Governor of New Brunswick, my deepest thanks for your presence here at my episcopal ordination. Allow me, Your Excellency, to extend to you, your spouse and your children my sincerest wishes of peace and joy, as well as to The Honourable Premier and this Province's entire population.

To the members of the Legislative Assembly, to the civil and political authorities and their representatives, to His Worship the Mayor of Edmundston, I express my gratitude for your warm welcome and your kindness on my behalf. May the Lord bless all of your undertakings on behalf of peace, justice, and love. Through your actions, your legislation, your various initiatives you continue to indicate that the love of God extends to youth, families, workers, the unemployed, the elderly, and the suffering.

GRATITUDE TO OUR SISTER-CHURCHES

Members and ministers of other Christian Churches, and Your Grace Bishop George Lemmon, Anglican Bishop of Fredericton, I thank you for being here. Thank you for your solidarity. On the eve of the great Week of prayer for Christian Unity, may our lives and our ministry proclaim God's everlasting love. Nothing can keep us from the love of God.

GRATITUDE TO THE PRIESTS AND FUTURE PRIESTS

Priests, deacons, and seminarians of the Church of Edmundston, throughout my ministry in the Church of Edmundston I want to reassure you in a very special way how I want to be closely united to you, and get to know you better. In the weeks to come I shall visit you and the members of your Christian communities. As early as next week I shall be visiting you, people of the Restigouche. Let us never doubt that the Lord infinitely loves us; he asks us to be shepherds after his own heart, to proclaim by our whole lives that the love of God is very much alive. Before all else, we must be faithful to prayer and the service of the Word.

Dear brothers in the priesthood, my wish today is that we dedicate, either together or in our respective milieus, monthly days of silence and recollection, adoration and spiritual renewal, of prayer and petition, penance and conversion. I pray the Lord to grant me these times aside throughout the coming year, each first Thursday of the month, for meditating on the Word of God and the teaching of Vatican Council II on the mystery of the Church. Every priest shall be welcome at the Diocesan Centre, along with all those who want to share in this prayer time. On that day of the month, the bishop's agenda will simply have « day of prayer, » and I believe that it will be for me a way of carrying out one of the main obligations I have just today, to intercede on behalf of the People of God and appropriately carry out the bishop's priestly function.

GRATITUDE TO THE PEOPLE OF THE DIOCESE

Dear brothers and sisters of the diocese, I thank the Lord for the beautiful gift He gives me today of the Church of Edmundston. The pastoral ring I wear signifies the wonderful alliance with the Church of Edmundston. « Corde magno et animo volenti » it is with willingness of heart and eagerness that I accept to love and serve this Church in days of joy as in difficult times. Ours is a very young Church since December 16, 1994 will mark the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the diocese. Ours is a special Church marked by its Maliseet culture, the Francophone cultures of Québec and Acadia, and the Anglophone cultures of Canada and the United States. It is an outstanding crossroads of peoples and nations where there is competition as to who is the friendliest, who is more creative, who has more independence or solidarity.

« At all times and in every race, anyone who fears God and does what is right has been acceptable to Him. He has, however, willed to make men holy and save them, not as individuals without any bond or link between them, but rather to make them into a people who might acknowledge him and serve him in holiness. »

God wills that all the baptised in the People of God constituted the one Body of Christ be co-responsible for the Church's mission in the world. The truth is that the baptised are called to serve Christ on this basis of co-responsibility. All together, day after day, in their families and communities, and each according to his or her social or political responsibilities and projects, these baptised people contribute to the extension of the Reign of God in this diocese, in this country.

PASTORAL PRIORITIES

Brothers and sisters, I have major priorities: a new evangelisation, such that Christians rediscover the joy that comes from being missionaries, a rediscovery of the Gospel in such a way that together we live daily like Jesus, a rediscovery of our dignity and of our mission as baptised people so that like beloved sons and daughters we pass on to our countrymen and women the hope brought to us by Jesus the Son of the living God.

BAPTISMAL MISSION

On this day of the Baptism of Christ it is well to remember that we are called by the Father, united to Jesus, quickened by the Spirit and sent out to the world. This is the marvel under our eyes; this is one of the proofs that the love of the Lord is from age to age . Hence, it is important for us to follow through on our baptism .

« The general mobilisation demanded by the new evangelisation presumes a revaluing of baptism, the unequivocal statement that it is at the root of all Christian life, and the very heart of fraternal communion. »

« For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will and in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God » (Col. 1:9, 10).

CHURCH-AS-COMMUNION

For our Church to be one of communion, for real bonds to continue to be established between our parishes and the diocesan services, between church and social organisations in our area, communication must be pursued and even increased at every level. First contacts I have had with the media in our region appear very promising, and I thank and congratulate those responsible.

CONCERN FOR THE FAMILY

The 1994 International Year decreed by the United Nations will focus on families throughout the world; it will be important for us to look at those in our midst, especially those in the process of being formed; we shall have to be attuned to those families with social, economic, and even church-related problems.

We shall have to be extra attentive to families in our own milieus. The quality of life of any given society depends on the quality of life of the family. Let us all together pay special attention to all family members, the elderly, the spouses, the workers, the unemployed, youth and children, and the sick.

CONCERN FOR VOCATION MINISTRY

We shall have to set as priority prayer to the Lord to send workers to his harvest, shepherds after his heart, to our parishes, our towns and villages, our workplaces and places of leisure: priests, religious brothers and sisters, pastoral agents, and Christian leaders, so that each community can continue to be vibrant, fraternal, and mission-minded.

Faced with all these priorities, in the next few days I shall establish a provisional episcopal council to collect the answers to a diocesan consultation which will serve as a guide regarding what we must do. Your sense of participation and of coresponsibility will help me facilitate and govern this beloved Church of Edmundston.

CONCERN FOR THE SUFFERING

My most fraternal and affectionate greetings are addressed in a very special way to all those people afflicted with illness. I offer my blessings and prayers for healing for all the sick, at home, in a convalescent home, or in the hospital. I extend my best wishes for peace and solidarity to you and to the medical and nursing personnel. It will be a particular cause of joy for me, this week, to visit the sick of the Edmundston Regional Hospital.

GRATITUDE TO MY FAMILY

Allow me to greet in a special way the members of my family as well as all the friends here with us today; I am glad that you were able to make it here today for such an event, despite the weather conditions. You have always been closely united to me throughout my ministry, and I am certain that this will continue to be so always. Brothers and sisters, nieces and nephews, uncles and aunts, cousins, co-parishioners, parish priests and assistants at Saint-Odilon, especially Father Lucien Ouellet who introduced me to classical studies, and Father Léandre Poirier, actual pastor of Saint-Odilon; friends of the Beauce Region and of Québec, mayor of Saint-Odilon, the Beauce Region Member of the National Assembly, I want to express to you all my fraternal gratitude. It is pleasant to have lived these last hours together. Through your acts of friendship and solidarity you forcefully show me the love of the Lord. It is barely a four hours' drive from Saint-Odilon to Edmundston: in daily prayer and thought, the distance is quickly covered!

GRATITUDE TO THE EUDISTS

Brothers and sisters of the Eudist family, affiliate and associate members, to all of you whom I have had the privilege of serving as provincial superior during forty months, you have journeyed with me in a very special way since my episcopal appointment on October 20. I was given countless proofs of kindness and goodness from each and everyone of you, from every community, from the North-American Province and its interim provincial Father Bernard Cantin and his council; from the France-Africa Province and its provincial superior Father Claude Mellier who is with us today, from the Province of Colombia and Venezuela, from the Generalate and the Superior General Father Pierre Drouin who assisted me at this Mass, and from the General Council. Confreres and friends came numerous, from Québec, Québec's North Shore, Montreal, the Gatineau\Hull region, and even from San Diego, Louisiana, and Buffalo: I thank you most sincerely. At the end of the year marking the three hundred fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Eudists, you have accompanied me to this new ministry. It is under new guises that I shall pursue the evangelisation and formation mission which is the mark of all good Gospel workers, in union with the countless people who identify with the Eudist spirituality.

GRATITUDE TO THE CELEBRATION'S ORGANISERS

I offer my deepest gratitude to all who have made possible this unforgettable celebration. To all of you who gave unstintingly of your time and energy to welcome us, to the invitations and reception committee, the liturgy committee, to all those who took part in the celebration, to the chancellor, the cathedral pastoral team, the organist, choir, cantors, lectors, masters of ceremony; to the media, especially to Edmundston Cable Television, Ltd., to radio station CJEM-CKMV, to Radio-Canada and to Le Madawaska newspaper, to the committee chairpersons and in a special way to Father Almer Levasseur, pastor of the Cathedral; to Sister Solange Michaud, D.W., liturgy coordinator, to Miss Charlene Picard, in charge of the Welcome Committee, and to Mr. Joseph Albert and Mrs. Jeannine Albert of the Reception Committee; and to the general coordinator of the activities as a whole, Msgr. Eymard Desjardins. It is thanks to you that we have really had a taste of how the love of the Lord is everlasting, how it is good to live together as members of the same family and the same Church. A thousand thanks to all those who worked at preparing and carrying out this celebration!

+ François Thibodeau ym

+ François Thibodeau, c.j.m.
Évêque d'Edmundston