
ALREADY HALF-WAY!



We are daily getting closer to Easter. "With eyes fixed upon Jesus Christ, let us engage in the combat of God": This was the invitation given to us at the beginning of Lent. And now, here we are half-way through the season: Where are we, though, in our spiritual "training" to better live as disciples of Jesus? Where are we in our effort to join in "prayer, fasting, and sharing" in the manner of Jesus? Lent 1995 can be an exceptional year for us to evaluate the quality of our daily lives: our fraternal relationships, our work, our prayer, our courage, our life as a whole.

A FEW INDISPENSABLE EVALUATIONS

- Workers:

We are asked to daily perfect and achieve the immense task of creation. Does our way of being and doing enable men and women as well as children to have working and living conditions which respect their dignity? In striving to better our own situation, do we always act in a spirit of solidarity and service? Work is like a key and, as Pope John Paul II wrote, in his encyclical on labour, probably the primary key of every social question. "The first chapter of Genesis forms the first gospel of labour. Jesus proclaimed and practised the gospel that had been given to him. It was truly the gospel of labour, because the one proclaiming it was himself a labourer, an craftsman like Joseph of Nazareth."

- Youth

What is the place occupied by youth in our society? What are the values proposed to them? What kind of future is promised them? What is the work available to them? Where do their long years of studies lead them? What is the leisure offered them? We have only to think of the many unemployed [youth], of all those who have given up, of those who no longer know what to do, what to come up with in order to survive... How much time are we willing to spend in order to find out what there is in the world of youth, and to be with the youth of our milieu? Yes, how much time do we give to youth, to welcome them, listen to them, and share with them? Human and financial investments in youth by society and Church are generally considerable, if one can trust the different reports from the fields of education and manpower, without forgetting the field of pastoral ministry. It isn't always easy to explain the gulf that sometimes exists between youth and their elders. But still, our youth are a living challenge to our pastoral concern in the midst of the world as well as to society's projects for both today and tomorrow.

- Women

Women are those most affected by growing poverty, by the effects of unemployment and the economic crisis. In a number of areas, women still earn less than their male counterparts. Women heads of families, elderly women and working women with no protection are in a distressing situation. It comes as no surprise then that a considerable number of women, both young and not so young, are exposed to pressures, exploitation, and violence that threaten their human dignity. The rediscovery of the fundamental equality of man and woman by baptism imposes on us a like rediscovery of new attitudes and behaviours.

- Those in Search of Their Dignity

Our attitude and behaviour towards the marginalised witness to the quality and truth of our faith by the simple fact of our concern or lack thereof for justice. The God who revealed Himself in Jesus and who created us in His likeness constantly calls on us to recognise the fundamental dignity of every human being, in our work of building up the Kingdom. Prejudices we carry with us, insulting and hurtful names by which we tag those excluded from our milieus contradict a fundamental statement of our faith: that we are all children of the same Father. The absence of human solidarity with excluded persons challenges not only our degree of tolerance but also the depth of our conversion to the Gospel.

- People of the Third World

We read the following, in the book of the prophet Isaiah: "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house... and not to hide yourself from your own kin?" [Is. 58:6-7] What we economise through our fasting we can share with those who have no food. Since 1967, the Catholic Organisation for Development and Peace is very active in our milieu, and I want to thank all of you for your great generosity and invite you to keep on sharing; more than \$50,000.00 were sent to Development and Peace from our diocese, last year. Lent opens the heart to world-wide misery. Our fasting, in union with Jesus' fast in the desert, takes on an altogether different significance: millions of men and women - especially young people - are going without food even today.

Lent is truly an extraordinary time to live deeply the daily reality. Let us be steadfast in pursuing our Lenten training. Easter 1995 will be all the more wonderful for it.

A DATE TO RETAIN: MONDAY OF HOLY WEEK, APRIL 10

One of the most significant liturgical celebrations is without doubt the *Chrism Mass* in the course of which the bishop blesses the oils to be used at Baptism, Confirmation, priestly and episcopal ordination, and the anointing of the sick. This year, the Chrism Mass will be celebrated at Notre-Dame-des-Sept-Douleurs Church [Edmundston] at 7:30 P.M. Even if each parish is represented by a member of their Christian community, remember that everyone is invited to this celebration. During the Mass, all the priests will be renewing their priestly commitments, and in this jubilee year, these take on a very special meaning. Privileged heirs of a young Church, together we want to take up the new challenges and respond to the spiritual needs of the 60,000 people of our diocese.

April 8 will mark the 20th anniversary of Bishop Gérard Dionne's episcopal ordination; he was my beloved predecessor and fourth bishop of Edmundston. His anniversary will be marked in the course of the Chrism Mass. You can now understand why Notre-Dame-des-Sept-Douleurs Church was chosen for the occasion: Bishop Dionne lived in that parish; it is there that he was ordained priest on May 1, 1948, and consecrated bishop April 8, 1975. He also served in that parish from 1948 to 1956 as assistant, and was pastor there from 1971 to 1975. May the Lord grant him excellent health and give him one hundredfold for all that he [Bp. Dionne] has accomplished with such love and generosity for the Edmundston Diocese Church.

+ François Thibodeau ym

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