



### **From A Bishop's Journal (777)**

#### **Immaculate Conception: Our Diocese's Patronal Feast**

**O**n December 8 the Church will be celebrating the feast of the Immaculate Conception, which is also the patronal feast not only of the first parish in Edmundston but of the whole diocese. While in 1880 the Petit Sault [Little Falls] Mission [now Edmundston] was under the patronage of Our Lady (Notre-Dame: Notre-Dame-du-Petit-Sault or Notre-Dame-du-Madawaska), the first pastor, Father Louis-Côme D'Amours placed his church more and more under the protection of the Immaculate Conception. When, on December 16, 1944 the new Diocese of Edmundston was erected, the Holy See designated the church of the Immaculate Conception as the see of its new bishop. Bishop Marie-Antoine Roy, O.F.M. was ordained Bishop August 15, 1945, and on April 26, 1947 he petitioned Rome to obtain that the diocese be officially placed under the patronage of the Immaculate Conception. This was granted by Pope Pius XII on June 13, 1947.

#### **Same Patronage**

The Diocese of Edmundston is not the only one under the patronage of the Immaculate Conception. Close to a quarter of the Canadian dioceses are under her patronage. The very first diocese in New France (Québec), was placed under her patronage by Blessed François de Laval in 1674, that is, some 335 years ago. Besides the ecclesiastical provinces of Montréal and Ottawa, the following are under the protection of the Immaculate Conception: Calgary (1912), Grand Falls, NL (1856), Hamilton (1856), Hearst (1938), Joliette, Qc. (1904), Kingston (1818), London (1856), Mont-Laurier (1913), Montréal (1820), Nelson (1936), Pembroke (1882), Saint-Boniface (1851), Saint John, NB (1842), St. John's, NL (1847), Saint-Jérôme (1951), and Timmins (1872).

#### **Centuries-Old Devotion**

Veneration of the Virgin Mary started very early, in the Church. In 431 the Council of Ephesus proclaimed Mary to be the Mother of God, and from the fifth century on, "Marian feasts" multiplied. When the Church celebrated feasts of the Lord, the role of Mary in the history of salvation was highlighted: Annunciation, Visitation, Nativity, Purification... and gradually other feasts were added: Dormition or Assumption, Immaculate Conception, etc. It is certain that the proclamation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception by Pope Pius IX in 1854, and the apparitions of the Blessed

Virgin at Lourdes in 1858, under the title of the Immaculate Conception – “*Que soy era Immaculada Concepciou*” – have made popular among the people of God a strong devotion that has never diminished: The crowds of people at the Lourdes shrine are a fine example of this. Then there is the many short prayer to the Virgin of the Miraculous Medal: “O Mary conceived without sin, pray for us who have recourse to you.” It is a fine expression of the deep faith of the Christian faithful. However, more than ever, on this 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Mary appearing to Saint Bernadette, at Lourdes, the words that the Virgin spoke in the local dialect are echoed throughout the world today: “I do not promise to make you happy in this world, but in the next. Penance. Pray God for the conversion of sinners. Climb the hill on your knees, and kiss the earth as a sign of penance for sinners. Penance, penance, penance. Go wash yourself in the fountain, and eat some of the grass that is there. Go tell the priests to come here in procession, and to build a chapel.” And on March 25, 1858: “I am the Immaculate Conception.”

### **Message of “the Beautiful Lady”**

Whenever Bernadette talked about the apparitions she spoke of “the Beautiful Lady” that she had seen; she did not yet know the name of this lady who was so beautiful and sweet, so ready to listen and so attentive. According to the teaching of Pope Benedict XVI when he visited Lourdes, September 14, when “the Beautiful Lady” revealed her name to Bernadette, she also revealed the extraordinary grace that she, Mary, had received, the grace of having been born without sin, because God had looked on his lowly servant. “Mary is the woman of ours who totally surrendered to God and who was granted the privilege of giving human life to His eternal Son. “Behold the handmaid of the Lord, let everything be done according to your will.” She is transfigured beauty, a picture of the new humanity. In presenting herself thus in total dependence on God, Mary expresses in reality an attitude of total freedom founded on a full recognition of her true dignity. The privilege concerns us, too, because it shows us our own dignity as humans, marked with the stigma of sin, surely, but saved through hope which helps us live our daily life. This is the path that Mary has opened for us. Placing our trust in God is to find the path to real freedom. As man turns to God, man becomes fully human. He finds his original vocation of one who has been created into the image and likeness of God.

### **A Meeting Place**

“The Lourdes shrine’s primary vocation,” Pope Benedict continued, “is to be a meeting place with God in prayer, and a place of service to our brothers, especially as they welcome the sick, the poor, and the suffering. In this place, Mary comes to us as a mother, always available to the needs of her children. Through the light that shines from her face, it is the mercy of God that comes through. Let us allow ourselves to be touched by her look that says we are the beloved children of God and that He will never abandon us. Mary reminds us, here in this place, that deep and humble prayer, trusting and persevering, must have a place in our Christian life... Mary can also tell you that not one of you is indifferent to God. He looks down kindly on each one of you and calls you to a happy, meaningful life... Mary’s message is a message of hope for all men and women of our time, wherever they live.”

## Lourdes-Edmundston

As we celebrate this week the Immaculate Conception, let us remember that not only our cathedral but the whole diocese must continue to be special meeting places with God, and places of service to our neighbour. Mary tells us that Jesus walks on our paths and, like Bernadette, we can meet him there. May the grace of the Lourdes Jubilee bring us many blessings!

+ François Thibodeau *gm*

+ François Thibodeau, C.J.M.  
Bishop of Edmundston

12-03-08