

PASTORAL MESSAGE FROM OUR BISHOP

Catechetical Mission

Church Of Gatineau-Hull
September 2002

Sisters and brothers, beloved in God our Father and in the living Christ, acting among us by His Holy Spirit,

Peace and joy, hope and courage, communion and the missionary spirit be with you all!

At the beginning of this new pastoral year wells within the memory of my heart this moving chapter in Luke (Lk 24, 13ss), called: “The disciples from Emmaus”. As has so admirably commented it Cardinal Martini, we see in this story that Jesus “Loves company, he seeks out the people, he runs after the disciples from Emmaus, catches up to them on the way, revives the enthusiasm within them; he does it so well that even they go back, running, to join the others and to announce the Good News to them”¹.

They were going their way, but mostly as those who have had their dreams dashed. Tired? At least “downcast”, the text outlines. They were discussing something while walking together, and were perplexed by something which did not sit well with them... As these disciples on the evening of Easter, we are all on the way. For the past five years we have visited the various sites of our diocesan construction project: realignments for the Mission, formation for the ministries, catechetical Mission. We have dared to believe that a new generation of believers awaits us; or we have been satisfied with the routine, affecting an attitude both blasé and fatalistic. Nevertheless, I perceive that there are among us questions, uncertainties, hopes and draft projects. Sometimes fatigue, scepticism, sadness and

¹ CARLO M. MARTINI, *Abraham notre père dans la foi*, Éditions Saint-Augustin, 1994, p. 186.

pessimism all creep in .

Jesus walks with us now, as He did at the time of Emmaus

“Jesus himself came up and walked by their side”. And so today Jesus walks up to us as Church and asks the questions: “What are all these things that you are discussing as you walk along ?” By means which seem disconcerting to us all, such as this law on school education which forces us to face our responsibility as Church, He takes the initiative and calls us to task gently to open our eyes and our hearts. Let us dare, in our own hearts, in our pastoral teams and various Councils, tell Him of our difficulties in accepting to go where He wants us to go to live out our catechetical Mission. His friendly approach invites us to see together what is going on and to allay our fears as we face the challenges and the calls from the Spirit. “Why are you both so sad ?” He thus forces us to ask ourselves if what is happening is truly a bad predicament, or rather if it is not a new way towards a new life ?

Jesus entrusts us with the Mission of initiation

Above all, let us have the courage to listen to Him as He says loud and clear : "O foolish men! So slow to believe all that the prophets have said! ... ” By the Spirit who is leading our Quebec Churches in this direction, he outlines our mission to us in a new way: to proclaim the Gospel and build up the Body of Christ that is the Church; give birth to new Christians, to new believers and to strengthen the staunch faithful. The Church is there to evangelize. The catechetical Mission is carried out on the road travelled by the children, the teenagers, the adults; the men and women of today. The Spirit pushes us towards ways that are new, yet rooted in the Church`s Mission of always and that is amply revealed to us in the episodes of the New Testament. New horizons are appearing before us!

No doubt it is to us that Jesus is saying: “But have you still not understood?” And He goes on to quote for us all these texts of the New Testament: “Go forth, and of all make disciples...” We are living times which are unpredictable, that escape our forecasts and our habits. We must listen anew to the Word of God. And the road, seemingly so new to us, is mapped out by the very steps of Jesus himself, the first of evangelizers, and by the letters of the Apostles. Now as then, the catechetical Mission is part of the general process of Christian life initiation.

Who must we initiate ?

First, those who were awakened , fascinated and captivated by the Good News of Jesus Christ. Here we must insist: it is in total freedom that one accepts to live as Jesus did. No one can force the other to respond to the love of God. The Gospel refers to freedom, to responsibility, to a loving solidarity. The Spirit of the Gospel, the Paraclete, is a spirit of freedom, that leads to a loving and prayerful adoration of the Father, to a life among brothers, and to siding with humans, especially those scarred by life.

To what must they be initiated ?

To the various aspects of faith. Initiation to Christian life is carried out through the same methods used by Jesus to initiate his own disciples:

- He revealed to them the mystery of the Kingdom of God (Discourse of Parables in *Mt* 13) ;
- He taught them how to pray (“When you pray, this is what to say: Father...” *Lk* 11, 2) ;
- He instilled in them evangelical attitudes (“Shoulder my yoke and learn from me... ” *Mt* 11, 29 and the many words of initiation to faith

in the Father such as in *Lk* 11,11-13 ; 12, 22-32) ;

- He taught them how to see the needs and pains of others (The 14 miracles in *Lk* 5-9 that relate to all sorts of human suffering and the many words of mercy) ;
- He broke them in for the Mission (“He sent them out two by two”, *Mt* all of chap. 10).

Who will do this ?

Christians who are available to transmit to others their experience of Christian life and community. Others who have a grasp of the Mission, that tie in their Mission to that of Jesus, who live in solidarity with the poor, who can read the everyday events, who can speak to others as in the Word of God, who do not think of themselves as the source of the message they bear nor as the source from which springs the free response of the one to whom the Word is proclaimed.

How will this be accomplished ?

Within and through the life of the community, of the parish, of a movement or otherwise. It is within the daily life of the family and its daily rites that its values are passed on, and so, and it is on what already remains in the community, in terms of Gospel values that Christian initiation must rely. Our first task is to become unceasingly what we are by the grace of the Spirit, a community where the mercy of God dwells, where the Kingdom of God is established. The persons led to Christian life initiation are led through concrete activities to a process where they will experience for themselves the various axes of Christian

life: better realize what a gift faith is, what celebrating one's faith means, what community life can bring, becoming closer to those scarred by life in seeing in them children of God who loves them all and who wants that they should live in dignity and freedom. It is a matter of entering together this process where faith assures of God's presence in a community gathered in His name. A community where the Mission of Jesus, the Mission given to us by the Father, is lived out. The witness borne by the life of the community of believers paves the way for the Gospel. Only the mature and responsible community, where commitments are carried out together, can hope to succeed at Christian life initiation. This is the community and missionary approach to which we are called as diocesan Church.

What about sacramental preparation ?

The time has come to find a place for sacramental preparation within the Christian life initiation process, as happened for so many centuries before and as still is happening in Churches that realize that they are in missionary circumstances. In seeing how the members of the community live, certain persons may want to go one step further in their life of faith. Their desire must be taken seriously in order to accompany them and help them see the meaning of the step or steps they are about to take in their human life and their life of faith by pertinent catecheses. Reminding ourselves all the while that the Spirit precedes us in this accompaniment. The catechetical approach recommended by the catechesis within an itinerary, cross-generational, community-based and decompartmentalized, that seems to be the way the Spirit is indicating for our Church.

We feel that there is the challenge which might give rise to fears and apprehensions. And so we too must turn to Jesus and say persistently and with faith: "Stay with us"(Lk 24, 29). Jesus catches up to the disciples on the way, he had walked with them, he had listened to them, he had brought to their ears the Good News proclaimed by Scriptures, he had broken bread with them, they had recognized Him, they had in turn been able to return to the community and bear to others the Good News of the Risen Christ. Themselves bearers of the Good News, they had become adults in the faith. It is this same decision that Jesus is leading us to make. The Mission entrusted to the one who wants to live in the manner in which Jesus lived is a Mission of accompaniment: to catch up with, to come close to, to go along with, to listen to, to ask questions of, to open up the Word of God for, wait to be accepted by, take the time for, celebrate with, bring to maturity, and leave room for freedom of interpretation of the Mission. Unlike for Jesus, to provide adequate accompaniment, we must let ourselves be evangelized by a mutual sharing that provides room for the Spirit to act.

"Stay with us !" This cry stems from an experience resulting in the gift of a new heart. "Did not our hearts burn within us... They set out that instant, returned... told their story"(Luke 24, 32-35). May the Holy Spirit, the instigator and drive of all evangelizing endeavour lead us together to this experience. We will also be able to go back on what we talked along the way, on the worries, on the doubts that we had on the way; we will also be able to remember together the hopes, the certainties, the taste for the adventure to which we are driven by the Risen Christ who says to us, as we begin this new

millennium: “Cast out into deep water”². We are not without means to venture forth. The Risen Christ is always there with the Word of God and the breath of the Holy Spirit.

We are invited by Christ himself to give birth to new believers: “Go forth, make disciples”(Mt 28, 19). These disciples will see the light only when they can see and experience a community of believers who live out on a daily basis the values proclaimed by the Gospel and bear witness to them. Remembering that faith is linked to God’s gratuitous intervention and the freely given consent of the person, let us all be guided by the Spirit who is the only one who can teach us to live according to the Gospel values of adoration and faith in God, of justice, of love, of freedom and of peace.

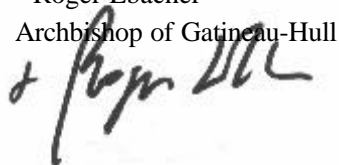
A plan of action

That is what we are called to this year, as diocesan Church: Take the road to Christian life initiation. We must put aside times for meetings, times for sharing the experiences we have had in our different milieus, all this that we might become evermore an evangelizing and missionary Church.

And I ask Mary, Mother of the Church and patroness of

² This is one of the basic themes of the Apostolic Exhortation by John-Paul II, for the beginning of the new millennium (*Novo millennio ineunte*). This is a text which can be read together, and read again in our various apostolic and pastoral gatherings..

our diocese, to be with us, as in the Cenacle, as we too ask for the Spirit, and may she say to us constantly, as she did at Cana : “All that He will tell you to do, do it!”.

^Roger Ébacher
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