



**“When the Son of man comes, will he find any faith on earth?”**  
*(Luke 18: 8) (Reflections on our parish life)*

We have all just lived through some times that are somewhat surreal. For more than three months, the entire world has been practically paralyzed because of the propagation of a virus for which we are still desperately seeking a vaccine. This dramatic event has reminded us, in spite of ourselves, of our fragility and our limits as human beings, but also as a society and as a church. Thus, progress and science are not all-powerful.

The Church, like a Mother, never abandons her children, especially in difficult times when they need her even more. That is why in our diocese, during this period of confinement, has decided to keep our administrative offices open in order to continue responding to your needs. When our churches are closed and visits are prohibited, we must be creative and make use of current technology to contact you: the good old telephone, the radio, or the internet (with different messages, capsules, or hymns on Facebook, Zoom, and YouTube, masses broadcast on the radio or through streaming, etc.).

In spite of all these initiatives, good in themselves, we have all felt a certain emptiness, a lack, a deep dissatisfaction. A reaction that is completely healthy and normal! Since we are creatures in relationship, created in the image of God, a God of love, A God in Three Persons, we need human warmth and “in person” presence of parents, of neighbors, and of friends. As baptised people, members of the Body of Christ, we have perceived even more the necessity for us Christians to gather together on Sunday to celebrate our faith and commune with the Body and the Blood of Christ. Because the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist calls for our presence in order to receive it and to be transformed. Didn't Christ tell us: *“In all truth I tell you, if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Anyone who does eat my flesh and drink my blood has eternal life, and I shall raise that person up on the last day.” (John 6:53-54)*

In these days of confinement, we have also better grasped the origin of the term “Church” (from the Latin *ecclesia* or from the Greek *ekklesia*), which signifies “assembly.” Often, when we see the word “Church,” we think spontaneously of the institution, of the pope, of the buildings, forgetting that its first meaning is actually the “assembly,” “gathering” of our brothers and sisters in the faith to be the body of Christ. It is not at all surprising to have felt that something was missing by having been confined!

The first Christians understood it well. In the year 304, the emperor Diocletian had forbidden Christians, under pain of death, to possess the Holy Scriptures, to gather on Sunday to celebrate the Eucharist, and to build places of worship. In Abitinae, currently a small Tunisian village, 49 Christians were surprised one Sunday celebrating the Eucharist in a house, thus defying the imperial prohibitions. They were arrested and then interrogated by the Proconsul who wanted to know why they had transgressed the emperor's order. They answered him quite simply: *« Sine dominico non possumus »* “Without coming together in assembly on Sunday to celebrate the Eucharist, we cannot live. Because we would not have the strength to confront the difficulties of each day without perishing.” Tortured atrociously, these 49 martyrs of Abitinae were all killed, thus confirming their faith by the spilling of blood. That is why it is so important for us today, as it was for these first Christians, to come together on Sunday to celebrate the Lord.

This period of confinement and the resumption of our celebrations have brought to light some of the ways we are poor, poor not only financially, but especially poor in volunteers and in the faithful. In the presence of the crying needs of our elders, of people who are alone or in spiritual distress. We find that we are destitute, often without the necessary resources to help them at the human or pastoral level. When it was time to resume our activities, several communities have struggled and struggle still to find volunteers younger than 70 years to put all the health requirements in place. We can now legitimately ask ourselves the following questions: Without our faithful and our volunteers 70 years of age and older, what will our parishes look like? Our assemblies? Our ministry? Without the presence of these people within our communities, what is the future? Furthermore, how can we become a missionary church without meeting and without counting on the young generations?

This season of the pandemic has shone a light on another troubling element. Several priests have become destabilized given the impossibility of celebrating the funerals and the Sunday masses. They have come to realize that practically all their time of ministry was monopolized by these celebrations. but the ministry of the priest is much wider, it amounts to more than just that. This awareness has made us realize that for a while now, certain parish ministries (including ministry to the sick, to persons in spiritual distress, people who are searching for God, the poor, the young, etc.) are suffering due to the lack of time on the part of our priests, whose attention has been monopolized by the celebration of the sacraments and also by the lack of volunteers.

### *The parable of the Sower*

This summer we heard again, during one of our Sunday Eucharists, this lovely parable of the Sower, a parable that can wisely guide our reflection. Noting that the young generations are almost absent from our celebrations, not very present among our volunteers, or responding practically not at all to the call to become a priest or to the consecrated life, I wonder whether the lack of fruit reflects the quality of soil chosen to be planted (that is, the heart, the life of people who are often the children and the grandchildren of our most fervent parishioners) or the fact that that the Word of God is no longer being sown, being offered to this soil?

Of course, there is, in our society, ground that is very hard, ground that not only refuses any Word of God, but which persecutes it, denigrates it, or which wants to prevent its proclamation. But we also find around us the shallow soils of people who have heard and accepted the Word of God that makes us live, but who struggle to find support and counseling. There is also ground that is full of brambles which are the problems of our world, the material and technological richness as well as a multitude of other seductions choking out any lasting reception of the Word in that soil. Such ground is waiting for our presence to be fortified, weeded, and fertilized by our care. Are we present?

Fortunately, there is also a lot of good land that is only waiting to hear the Word of God to produce a lot of fruit, ground that is questioning and searching for the divine, but also ground suffering and wounded by life (spiritual distress, loss of a reason for living, solitude, wounds in their body or in their soul, failure, deception, depression, etc.). How do we make contact today with this good earth to plant the Good News there? Thus, the little faith that we observe in our society, is it the fault of the quality of soil or the absence of sowers?

Christian Bobin, a French poet and writer, wrote this one day: *"I removed many useless things from my life and God came to see what was happening."* (*Ressusciter*, p. 49)

That is a quote that should call out to us! We, too, should undoubtedly go and do such a housecleaning in our ecclesial life to discover the Lord, to give back to God and to the proclamation of our faith the central

place reserved for them so that Christ may appear clearly on the face of the Church that we are. Given the absence or the slow but constant disappearance of the faith, what are we doing? Are we the sowers in our families, in our circles? Given so much questioning, suffering, and poverty, do we dare to present Christ to them in words and in actions? Are we still able to offer them the Truth that they are searching for? Are we then present to guide them in their way, to weed the ground if needed, and to nourish a budding faith?

Thus, a change must be made. We can take advantage of this challenge to pull ourselves together and review some of our ecclesial practices. We must stop scattering and being often superficial. It is truly the time to go straight to what is essential and to put aside everything that takes us away from the fundamental mission that Christ entrusted us with.

*“Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you. And look, I am with you always; yes, to the end of time.” (Matt 28: 19-20)*

This is what Christ entrusted to his apostles and to all of us today. We must, therefore, become missionaries again and evangelize those who are around us, in particular the young generations. We often talk about it, but we must act now. It is our duty to clearly proclaim our faith, especially the kerygma: *God exists, he has sent his Son to dwell among us and has now become our brother and our savior. We are thus no longer alone, because He is always with us and he fills us with his love. He died on a cross because of his love for us, and he was resurrected so that we, too, can also have access to eternal life.* This is the foundation of our Christian hope that makes us live and which makes us happy. But we must not keep this hope just for ourselves. It is meant to be shared.

At a general audience in 1986, St John Paul II said: *“According to the Council, the Church is ever more aware of her mission and duty and, let us say, of her essential vocation to proclaim to the world the authentic salvation found only in Jesus Christ, God and man” (cf. Ad Gentes 1 1-3)(22/10/1986).*

Speaking of that, in his post-synod apostolic Exhortation, *“Christus vivit,”* Pope Francis added that there are three truths that we all need to hear, in particular the young people: *“God loves you. Do not ever doubt it, no matter what happens in your life. You are loved infinitely, in all circumstances. Christ is your traveling companion, he is your savior. And Christ is alive to be the source of eternal life for you, thanks to the Holy Spirit.” (Ref. Ex Apost. Christus vivit ch 4)*

Centering again on the mission that Christ entrusted us with by once more placing God and the proclamation of our faith at the center of our pastoral activity would require audacity on our part to forge ahead, and the necessary discernment with regard to our current tasks. We will be called to engage our energies (words and actions) to be even more present in today’s world as Christians, with our values and our own identity (as priests, religious people, consecrated, or lay people). To do otherwise would be like that property owner who carefully waters the flowers of his garden without noticing that, behind his back, his house is burning!

This reality that we must face now, is, in part, due to our actions. How many times have we reduced the time and the requirements for catechism for the young people who are presented to us out of fear of upsetting certain parents? Administered the sacraments to people without even asking them if they have a modicum of faith, which would have doubtlessly have allowed us to journey with them? For too long, we have also neglected or failed to proclaim our faith clearly, in words and in action, when we could have done so. How many times have we participated in activities of the so-called lay society by disguising our Christian identity or by remaining silent about the evangelical values that motivate us out of fear of being rejected,

slandered, or denigrated? We have experienced only hesitation or embarrassment about sharing that which is the source of our happiness!

We can ask ourselves how Saint Paul would behave if he lived in our world today, he who gave this advice to the Christians of his era:

*“So you are never to be ashamed of witnessing to our Lord, or ashamed of me for being his prisoner; but share in my hardships for the sake of the gospel, relying on the power of God... Keep as your pattern the sound teaching you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. With the help of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, look after that precious thing given in trust.” (2 Timothy 1: 8,11-14) “In fact, preaching the gospel gives me nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion and I should be in trouble if I failed to do it.” (1 Cor 9:16)*

For his part, Pope Francis affirms in his encyclical, *“Evangelii Gaudium”*: *“The Church’s closeness to Jesus is part of a common journey; “communion and mission are profoundly interconnected”. In fidelity to the example of the Master, it is vitally important for the Church today to go forth and preach the Gospel to all: to all places, on all occasions, without hesitation, reluctance or fear. The joy of the Gospel is for all people: no one can be excluded. That is what the angel proclaimed to the shepherds in Bethlehem: “Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people (Lk 2:10). The Book of Revelation speaks of “an eternal Gospel to proclaim to those who dwell on earth, to every nation and tongue and tribe and people” (Rev 14:6).” (no 23)*

Thus, evangelization is not only sharing what is the source of our happiness and of our joy, it is also a source of joy in and of itself!

*“The Gospel joy which enlivens the community of disciples is a missionary joy. The seventy-two disciples felt it as they returned from their mission (cf. Lk 10:17). Jesus felt it when he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and praised the Father for revealing himself to the poor and the little ones (cf. Lk 10:21). It was felt by the first converts who marvelled to hear the apostles preaching “in the native language of each” (Acts 2:6) on the day of Pentecost. This joy is a sign that the Gospel has been proclaimed and is bearing fruit. Yet the drive to go forth and give, to go out from ourselves, to keep pressing forward in our sowing of the good seed, remains ever present. The Lord says: “Let us go on to the next towns that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out” (Mk 1:38).” (Evangelii Gaudium No. 21)*

We have everything we need to fulfill our mission. As St. John Paul II wrote in his Apostolic Letter, *“Novo millennio ineunte,”* “it is not therefore a matter of inventing a “new programme”. The programme already exists: it is the plan found in the Gospel and in the living Tradition, it is the same as ever. Ultimately, it has its centre in Christ himself, who is to be known, loved and imitated, so that in him we may live the life of the Trinity, and with him transform history until its fulfilment in the heavenly Jerusalem. This is a programme which does not change with shifts of times and cultures, even though it takes account of time and culture for the sake of true dialogue and effective communication.” (No. 29)

Thus we should, simply and personally, become more attached to Christ and to his teaching, and deepen his message more and more to make it current and pertinent for the world of today. In addition, by following the advice of Saint Paul, *“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good, what is capable of pleasing him, what is perfect” (Romans 12: 2),* we will avoid certain traps such as the one of becoming militants for one more NGO, of responding with priority to needs other than our first mission, or of becoming a secularized, worldly Church, instead of Christianizing the world as Pope Francis regularly reminds us.

This last temptation is the one that’s lying in wait for us. It consists of keeping quiet about, sweetening, or modifying the teachings that Christ entrusted us with, as a function of the beliefs and the ideologies that

are in fashion, so as to be more in harmony with society. Saint Peter fell to this temptation by reproaching Jesus for walking to Jerusalem to die there. In fact, according to the ideas circulating in his time, a Messiah who was going to die was clearly inconceivable. It was then that Jesus reminded him that *"his thoughts were not those of God, but those of men, and that if anyone wanted to follow him, he must renounce himself, take up his cross, and follow him."* (ref Matthew 16: 23-24). This advice is timely for us today.

This new evangelization calls for new attitudes from us and changes in our way of evangelizing. The Holy Spirit must inspire us in our discernment because, as Pope Benedict XVI often recalled, we are the members of the Church which is not "our" church but Christ's church. In fact, did not Jesus say to Simon: *"You are Peter and on this rock I will build my community. And the gates of the underworld can never overpower it."* (Matthew 16: 18) It is thus He who promised to build his Church and to accompany us until the end of time. It is He who strengthens us and guides us. It is He who shapes us into living rocks. Thus, we can count on Him and let Him act in our lives. Because the Church is not a construction that we can modify as we please, according to our tastes, the ideas or the ideologies in fashion at the time. Such a Church would not be Christ's church, but a human Church called to be eventually rejected by another generation like the cell phones that, as soon as they are put on the market, are already out of date with the announcement of the arrival of new, more powerful models.

May we recall that *"The Church is simultaneously well rooted in the event of the death and resurrection of Christ, and turned toward the future, waiting for the return of the Lord. It is there to give meaning to life and to death. It is there to allow each one of us to have access to eternal life. The Church must be at the service of this hope, essential to the Christian faith, and orient the faithful toward the only Lord who is our origin as well as our future."* (Benedict XVI, *Pastoral implications, in Conc (f) 1965 p. 54-55*) That is our responsibility that no one else can shoulder for us. Christ is counting on us. He has full confidence in us. Rereading the Encyclical, "Evangelii Gaudium", as well as the post synodal Exhortation, "Christus Vivit," of Pope Francis as well as the conciliar documents of Vatican II (such as *Lumen Gentium, Ad Gentes, Nostra Aetate and Dignitatis Humanae* ) would surely put us on the right path.

*"When the Son of man comes, will he find any faith on earth?" (Luke 18: 8)*

Christ's question is meant for us today. Will we, as members of the Church, know how to transmit our Christian hope to our contemporaries, in particular, to the young generations? I think so! With all our energy, our words, and our actions, we can respond in truth to their ever increasing spiritual needs, and orient them to the only Lord!

May the Holy Spirit, this breath of God, assist us in our discernment so as to become good missionary disciples, faithful to the mission that Christ has entrusted us with, and making sure that the faith remains ever present in our corner of the country which is Acadia. We will, of course, be able to count on Mary, our Mother and our patron, a woman of faith, who will know how to guide us in this beautiful missionary adventure.

*May the Lord bless you and fill you with his love.*

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Daniel Jodoin". To the left of the signature is a small cross symbol (+).

+ Daniel Jodoin, your bishop  
October 19<sup>th</sup>, 2020