

Birth of a New Church in Montreal

Nearly 1100 people were at St. Joseph's Oratory on October 7, 2009 for the relaunching of *Proposing Jesus Christ to All Ages*.

In his speech, Cardinal Jean-Claude Turcotte revisited the history of the Church being reborn in Montreal "because the times that God is giving us are new times." "This church is centred on serving the world through the witness of a faith that is freely chosen within a society of indifference and a multiplicity of belief systems", underlines the Archbishop.

The Popes call since Vatican II

As priest for over 50, bishop for nearly 28 years, and pastor and archbishop of Montreal for 19 years, the Cardinal said that he has seen many changes and transformations in society and in the church, especially in recent years. "For me, the Second Vatican Council is a light that has guided and given clarity to my path. The council left me with deep convictions that remain with me and give me life." Having known and listened to the popes who have guided the church over the last fifty years, the Archbishop underlined a few words of each of them in order to affirm that new situations and transformations in our times call for a new evangelization.

The Archbishop continues, "Evangelization is a Pascal initiative that touches each of us personally and as a group. It involves life and death. It is burial and resurrection. We are now living Easter as a Church community. This new Easter of the Church will make our Church into a different Church, but into a Church that remains grounded in Christ, in the Gospel, and on Peter."

1. From Christendom to Difference

The Church of "Christendom" was clerical and powerful. Its members often participated in its rites out of social pressure. "This Church no longer exists", he affirms. "We do not need to work to bring it back to life...because the times that God has given us to live are new. Compared to the past, we can already see some of the characteristics of this different Church peeping though as we give birth to it. I underline a few of these characteristics:

A. Christians have a Free and Conscious Commitment to Christ

"Although they are less numerous than before, members of this Church are more fervent and more involved. They have discovered Jesus Christ and his message for themselves and desire to meet Him, to follow Him and to love Him. They belong to the Christian faith more consciously. Often, they may also be converts who know that they are called to be *the salt of the earth and the light of the world*. (Matthew 5: 13-14)."

B. A Poorer Church, more Evangelical in Serving the World

The Archbishop recognizes that this Church will certainly be poorer and much less powerful than it once was. "In a society in which people who have no faith or who are indifferent to religion are definitely more numerous, this Church will realize more intensely that that it does not exist for its own survival, but for the life of the world and at the service of the world. Evangelization to make Jesus Christ known will be the fundamental preoccupation of this Church.

C. A Church led by Priests and Lay people in collegiality

There has been great progress in giving responsibility to lay people. While continuing to count ordained ministers among its ranks, this Church will be a Church of the baptised. "One of the major characteristics that make our new Church different from the old one will obviously be its more collegial leadership". The "pastoral units of tomorrow will be led by teams composed of priests, deacons, religious brothers and sisters, and lay ministers. Theirs will be the responsibility to give leadership and vitality in each pastoral unit".

2. A Church in progress, a new Church

The Church that Cardinal Turcotte envisions is a Church in progress and even a Church that we are still giving birth to, particularly regarding the application of the pastoral project targeted in *Proposing Jesus Christ to All Ages*.

"I know it is a huge task – so great that the results obtained could never reach our expectations. But will they accuse us of dreaming big when God himself plans to save all humanity? Are we going to stifle our hope when we know that to hope is to keep hammering away while holding onto our conviction that God alone can bring about all that we hope for within ourselves?"

As he discussed the evaluation of *Proposing Jesus Christ Today*, the Archbishop stated that the Church of Montreal is coming through a passage and learning to live as a Church in a new way.

A. Catechesis

As for catechesis, the children and youth who take part attend more voluntarily than before and their parents have a greater awareness of the need to be involved themselves as their sons and daughters will follow their example. Those involved as teachers in parish religious education programs are more diverse as are those becoming members of the Church.

B. Baptism

Today people of all ages may ask to be baptised. Their reasons for baptism are diverse and frequently inspired through the catechumenal process. “A wider variety of people get involved in the Church in various ways, wishing to make the faith and the path to belonging to Christ more available to people, in the Church, and of all ages.”

C. Church Involvement

The Archbishop paid tribute to the many people involved in various types of ministries and services such as catechetical programs and preparation for baptism. He gave particular mention to “parents who tell us how happy they are about the present situation and the work of our renewed pastoral teams, and how they are now getting back to talking about serious things with their families. They are relearning how to talk about God, about Jesus and about the Church, about meaning and about the important things in life.”

D. Mission and Responsibility

“Forwarding the Christian faith through discussion was once the responsibility of only a few. It is now becoming a mission and a responsibility of many. I am particularly struck to see how, in our diocese, pastoral teams are being formed of priests, deacons, religious and a great number of lay people. Bit by bit, announcing the Gospel is truly becoming a responsibility of the whole Church. The face of our Church and our way of being the Church has profoundly changed.”

E. Charisms and Ministries

Regarding this new Church, “Let us take another look at what the Apostle Paul says about the life of the Church. It is a body that calls on the talents, charisms and ministries entrusted to each of us in order to stay alive and accomplish its mission. There are many functions and many charisms, but only one Spirit acting in all. There is diversity of ministries, but in all, the same Spirit. We are all building the same body and proclaiming the same Gospel, in joy and in hope.”

“The Church in Montreal - how beautiful it is!”

In his closing remarks, the Archbishop said to the hundreds of people gathered at St. Joseph’s Oratory, “I see the Church of Montreal, and how beautiful it looks, as it is being built everyday thanks to all of you assembled here and to so many others who were not able to be here today.” He eagerly went on to say, “and at the heart of this Church, at its base and its summit – we must be fully aware – is Jesus Christ – who is counting on us despite our limits, who unceasingly renews our trust despite our failings and our slowness, and who assures us of his presence no matter the circumstances.”

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