



Homily given by
His Eminence Cardinal
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Archbishop of Quebec
Primate of Canada

FEAST OF SAINT MARTIN DE TOURS
250TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

*Saint Martin de Tours Parish, Saint
Martinville, Louisiana, United States of America,
November 11, 2015*

“ The Spirit of the Lord is upon you... ”

Dear Bishop Jarrell,
Brother bishops and abbot
Dear Father Richard,
Reverend Fathers and Deacons,
Men and women of Consecrated Life,
Brothers and sisters in Christ,

The Word of God, as usual is very rich, inspiring and challenging. The Biblical texts that are proclaimed at our Eucharistic celebrations not only talk to us about who our God is and how he operates, but also challenges us to be like Him, merciful, holy, just, loving and generous. Today’s feast of Saint Martin de Tours, your patron saint, is a wonderful opportunity to look more deeply into God’s plan for humanity and our call to participate in building a world in communion with God’s vision.

I’ve been following from a distance the very long political campaign that has already begun in your country, preparing to elect a president next year. And you must admit, there is a great

diversity in your candidates and politicians. Of course, it is the same in Canada. Our older generations recall one particular politician who was very active a few decades ago; a very outspoken and vibrant orator, who once pronounced these words during a campaign speech: “The government in place at the present moment, with its bad leadership and disastrous policies, has driven us to the edge of the abyss... ladies and gentlemen, if you elect me and my party, we will take you one step forward”.

Well, the Lord always invites us to move forward, but never towards the abyss; never towards despair or darkness. He leads his People to light, to abundant life, to love and truth. All through the history of salvation, he has manifested that love and mercy for humanity, never giving up in front of our rebellions. His hand is always outstretched to welcome us back home, to free us from sin, bringing us back to life, putting us back on our feet. I enjoy quoting the American author, Max Lucado, who wrote: “God loves you just as you are, but he refuses to leave you that way!” That is because God wants us to be better, filled with inner freedom and holiness. When you love someone, you always want them to become better. That is how God loves us and that is how he wants us to love our brothers and sisters.

The first reading today, from the Prophet Isaiah, speaks of the prophecy of the coming of the Spirit upon Jesus: to bring glad tidings to the lowly, to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and release to the prisoners. This was the mission of not only Jesus, but upon those he would send – his disciples and apostles. The Good News of Jesus Christ is not only something we proclaim in word, when we preach and catechize. It is the Good News we proclaim by our daily lives, when we recognize that we too, each and every one of us, is sent out to this world to accomplish that mission by personal and community witness. Our attitudes, our choices and the quality of our relationships give witness to the faith we proclaim. Saint Martin de Tours discovered that mission very early on in his conversion experience. We could even say that it is in living out that mission of compassion and caring for the needy that he encountered the living God. The Gospel passage we just heard reflects the spirit of Saint Martin's compassion and desire to serve the needs of the sheep of his own flock: he personally fed the hungry, gave drink to the thirsty, welcomed strangers, clothed the naked, cared for the sick and visited the imprisoned... and doing so discovered that he was serving the Lord Jesus. The impressive painting that hangs over the main altar of your church reminds us of that.

If you want to know if you are truly a disciple of Jesus Christ, don't just count the number of times you come to Mass or calculate the amount of prayer in your life. Ask yourself also how you share your faith, how you take care of people around you, and specially those most in need, the poor, those who suffer. Pope Francis wrote in his Apostolic Exhortation *the Joy of the Gospel*, these challenging words:

“Whenever our interior life becomes caught up in its own interests and concerns, there is no longer room for others, no place for the poor. God's voice is no longer heard, the quiet joy of his love is no longer felt, and the desire to do good fades. This is a very real danger for believers too. Many fall prey to it, and end up resentful, angry and listless. That is no way to live a dignified and

fulfilled life; it is not God's will for us, nor is it the life in the Spirit which has its source in the heart of the risen Christ."¹

Thank God we have the Word of God that always calls us back to the essentials, inviting us to conversion, to a change of heart. Thank God we have the examples of the saints, men and women, who, like Saint Martin de Tours, have inspired us throughout the history of the Church. And thank God we have pastors, brothers and sisters in our parish communities that we can continue to journey with, and grow to become true missionary disciples. You have been celebrating all through this past year the 250th anniversary of the establishment of this Parish.

Saint Martin de Tours Parish is the original home of the Acadians who came from Canada, my homeland, to Louisiana in 1765 and the mother church of the Acadians in Louisiana. Your history is a pilgrimage of faith that reveals how powerful a community of believers can be to overcome difficulties and continue its journey. You have every right to be very proud of your history, of your Acadian roots, on who you have become. This community has played a great role in the State of Louisiana. 250 years ago, you were part of our Diocese of Quebec. Today, you belong the Diocese of Lafayette. There are still many pages of history to write. Do not forget that the Spirit of the Lord God is upon you, because the Lord has anointed you and he has sent you to bring good news to all those in need.

Pope Francis has this to say about the parish community: *"The parish is the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God's word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration. In all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers. It is a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a centre of constant missionary outreach."*²

Brothers and sisters of Saint Martin de Tours Parish, as your patron saint embraced the poor and shared with them, not only his cloak, but also his faith, love and compassion, may the people you meet feel the warmth of Christ's embrace through your love and commitment and discover that your parish is a family of believers where there is room for them. So many of our brothers and sisters are out in the cold, searching for direction and light. Let's reach out to them and invite them to encounter Jesus Christ, the Savior, and invite them to open their lives to the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life. I am sure that it is with great effort that you upkeep this house of worship, a very significant and historical gathering place for your community. I am filled with wonder when I see the statues of the many saints that adorn your parish church; men and women who encountered Christ and lived the Gospel in their times. I hope and pray that you aspire to nothing less than holiness... for the world is in desperate need of saints! They are the ones who evangelize and leave a profound impact in history. Some saints accomplished a very public mission, like Saint Martin de Tours, Saints Peter and Paul; others were very discreet but not less fruitful like the Little Flower, Sainte Thérèse de Lisieux and our first native north American saint: Kateri Tekakwitha.

¹ Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, No 2.

² Pope Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, No 26.

What kind of saint do you want to become? It's time we considered that call, that vocation, more seriously. The Lord, in his goodness and mercy, has given us all we need to become saints. In the waters of Baptism, we were plunged in the Pascal mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and we are called to the fullness of life, to eternal life. He feeds us with the Word of Life and the Bread of Life and he is forever offering to restore us in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Let us be thankful for the Lord's faithfulness and implore his help so that we may continue our journey and share with the world we live, the Joy of the Gospel.

May our Lady, the Blessed Mother of Jesus Christ, the patron saint of the Acadian People and their descendants, watch over you and help you follow Jesus.

Happy and Holy 250th anniversary, Saint Martin de Tours Parish Community!