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Letter of the new Vicar

Msgr. Antoine de Rochebrune, the new Opus Dei vicar for Canada, following his arrival in the midst of a pandemic, addresses a message of hope to his new fellow citizens.

2021-03-22

Dear Friends,

I was appointed last spring by the Prelate of Opus Dei to represent him in Canada and to guide this Catholic institution throughout the country.

Fortunately, I am not alone: I can count on people who work with me from Montreal. Our task is to accompany people of Opus Dei – lay people and priests – and their apostolic undertakings: student residences, cultural centres, youth activities, etc., in what relates to our main activity: Christian Formation.

I arrive in Canada with 25 years of priesthood, of which about 20 years were spent in a ministry similar to this one, since I directed the Prelature in France. Such experience is certainly useful, and it is accompanied by a great love for this country which is mine now. I come from old Europe, as they say, and I am discovering what our ancestors called the New World. Therefore, my first impression is that of an explorer, of one who discovers.

A New Spring

Canada is twenty times the size of France. I see this as an invitation to have a broad vision and magnanimous spirit! I am moved considering that numerous founders of this country were saints whose lives are truly inspiring, and that this country was built on a very strong Christian identity.

Here and now, the Christian roots of Canada may seem to be buried and even give the impression that they no longer irrigate our society... But you who have experienced winter and spring also know that plants seem dead in winter and yet are reborn vigorously in spring. So I dream of a new spring for the Catholic Church in Canada and for this little family within the Church which is Opus Dei. I sincerely wish to contribute my share to the new evangelization of this country.

Pragmatism: an asset

My first steps in Canada include the discovery of a federal country, of a different social organization compared to France. As any other nation, Canada has specific features that I discover day after day. The pragmatism that I notice here is a great quality, which protects from getting lost in unnecessary analysis or details. This practical spirit seems to me an asset because it fits very well with the spirit of Opus Dei, which is concrete, dynamic and modern. It is my responsibility to help many Canadians discover this spirit. I want to tell them that our world is good, that God created it and placed us in it to make it even better. We have a wonderfully beautiful task, very relevant to the moment we are living in, which is to become better people, very good people, namely saints. That is how we will make this world better.

As I arrived here, I certainly discovered the Canadian winter, in all its beauty. Yet, I was also struck to see homeless people out in the cold. The business world stands side by side with fragile and often ignored human beings. Yet, materialism sometimes opens small windows to what we call solidarity. We Christians, and specifically people in Opus Dei, are called to live a Christianity of love: as Jesus said, "whenever you have done good to the least of these my brethren, you have done it to me" (Matt 25:40).

Pandemic : Christ at our side

As I arrive in this country, affected like so many others by this global pandemic, I see the considerable damage that this situation produces in relationships with our family, friends, colleagues at work and social acquaintances. I am aware that numerous students find themselves

isolated, that visits to the elderly are often very limited, that churches are open to just a few people, that many fall ill, and families are affected by bereavement, or by unemployment. All of this is a great sorrow, and I pray every day that things get better soon.

In this context, optimism is at the human level what Christians call the theological virtue of Hope. What does Hope tell me? It does not tell me that things will improve by lighting candles. Instead, Hope gives me the certainty that Christ is close to everyone at all times, especially in these times of trial. My experience in Opus Dei has allowed not only me, but many people, to understand this truth and to live by it. Whoever does not pray, or does not know how to pray, has a wonderful discovery to make: God comes to our encounter in ordinary life, giving meaning to our existence, and thus sanctifying it.

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