

Homily by Bishop Pierre-Olivier Tremblay, OMI
given during the Mass of Inauguration of his episcopal ministry
as Bishop of Hearst-Moosonee

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« COME AND SEE! »

I love visionary, daring people. From all eras, we love the stories of people who had dreams, who dared to do something new. People who started from scratch and built everything with their own hands. Nowadays, we are presented with stories of sportsmen and women, artists, explorers or inventors, businessmen or women, or people who wanted to change the political and social world.

The world of faith is also a place to dare, to hope, to dream! We have many examples, witnesses of daring and incredible faith who overcame many obstacles.

- Let us think of St. Francis of Assisi, in the midst of the Crusades, who went to meet the Sultan to dialogue with him: he changed the course of history by being a man of peace.

- Let us think of Saint Francis Xavier, who dared to cross the world as a missionary of the Good News of Jesus even to China!

- Let us think of St. Marie de l'Incarnation, an extraordinary woman, who left France to come here to teach everyone, the children of the newly arrived settlers as well as the children of the members of the First Nations.

And there are many, many others. I would even say that the vast majority of people of faith are less well known, they are in our midst, in our communities and in our families humbly committing their whole lives.

A. The dreams

So, yes, there are dreams, hopes that come from the spiritual life.

Today's Gospel presents us with the figure of the apostle Nathanael (whom tradition has likened to the apostle Bartholomew and whom we celebrate today). He is a seeker of God. He knows the Scriptures. We are told that he was sitting under the fig tree. We can see here a man who reflects, thinks, meditates. He shares the hopes of the people of Israel, who have been waiting for centuries for the arrival of the Messiah.

Jesus says to him: "I saw you under the fig tree. I know you Nathanael, you are a genuine, true man." Jesus honours the quest of this man, and of all his people. And from then on, because he sees himself understood, known, welcomed, Nathanael dares to make an act of faith, he trusts Jesus, he commits himself. The course of his life is completely transformed!

Today, it seems to me, Jesus says to us: "I saw you when you were under the spruce tree. When you were looking at the stars and the northern lights, when you were travelling the long northern roads, when you were thinking about what you would do with your life, yes, I saw you. I know

your dreams, your wildest desires, I know your deep, sometimes disappointed expectations.” Jesus honours and respects what is most precious in our hearts. God knows us, and loves us. Will we, like the apostle Nathanael, recognize in Jesus the Son of God and follow him?

It is not only the people of Israel or ourselves who have dreams. Imagine, God himself has them too! In the 2nd reading, the angel of the Lord speaks to the apostle John and says “Come and see!” He takes him to the mountain, the place of the vision, and shows him the Holy City. The Heavenly Jerusalem, dear friends, is God's dream! This image, I will explain a little, allows us to understand what is most dear to God's heart.

- The Holy City is shining like a precious stone, it is shining like a crystal! What God wants is beauty, light. It is great, it is precious.

- Surrounded by a high wall, it is a place of security and peace.

- Founded on the twelve apostles, on the Church, it is stable, lasting.

- With twelve gates in every direction, it is open to the world, and the whole world comes to it!

God's dream is that we should all be gathered with Him in peace and in the richness of a communion where each one, unique, is welcomed and respected as a treasure. Where everyone is called by name. So, do we accept and embrace this dream of God? As we know, the human response to God's plan has varied greatly. All of history shows us that there are obstacles, closures and sometimes we can fear that the dreams will fade away.

B. Obstacles and creative detours

Yes, there are obstacles to God's dream, but there are also creative detours!

A first obstacle is the reality of history with its unfortunate failures, disappointments... which we finally recognize as the issue of evil in the world.

So where is God's dream of a Heavenly Jerusalem? Can we see it concretely in the city of Jerusalem? Well, just two months ago I was there in that city, and it was there that the Apostolic Nuncio called me (by name) to tell me that the Pope was appointing me Bishop of Hearst-Moosonee. As we look at Jerusalem today, and its long history, the question rises up in us: where is God's dream? Where is this city of peace? There is so much tension, so much violence between peoples with their multiple beliefs and religions. Jerusalem is a symbol of contradiction. One can easily ask oneself if this dream of God is not just that... a dream.

And yet I can say that I have also seen something else: people from all over the world come to Jerusalem. And there are conversations that take place, meetings, humbly, but really. Jerusalem touched me, moved me. On June 5th, the day of Pentecost, I was in the very place where the first Pentecost took place, the place called the Cenacle, with brothers and sisters from all over the world. There I tasted something of the luminous happiness of God. Words are not enough here. I dare to believe it: the sins of mankind cannot prevent God from bringing his plan to fruition: God knows how to take the necessary detours to reach his goal!

At the same time, it must be said, God's response to our sufferings is not just to bypass them, even creatively, but goes much further. God allows himself to be touched by us and in return he

comes to touch us to heal us. The first reading announces true Good News for each of us, in our poverty, in our misery. These are difficult times for many. There are conflicts in many places: in our families, in our society, in our world (we see it in Ukraine and Syria among others) and even in our Church, in our communities. We all need, and particularly here in the Diocese of Hearst-Moosonee, healing in our hearts. God frees us from what keeps us prisoner: fears, grudges, judgments. He frees us from what has held us captive: comforts, wealth and security. Dear friends, we need real consolation and that is what God comes to offer us today!

A second obstacle to accepting God's dream, as we see in the apostle Nathanael, is that we can be rigid in our way of believing and have difficulty in letting God do things his way. The apostle had doubts about the announcement he received: "What good can come out of Nazareth?" He thinks he knows God's plans. He read the Scriptures. Like many people of his time, Nathanael believes that God will act as a mighty Lord, a Messiah who will crush the enemies of Israel. He knows what God will do...

And yet, God does not act as planned. He likes to surprise and act in simplicity, in poverty. That is why the response of the apostle Philip is so right: "Come and see!" It is not by arguments that we convince people of what is within us, it is in the encounter with a "Someone", with Jesus. It happens in the heart. God's response to our arguments, our reasoning and our doubts is... to come and see us!

But, Nathanael will say, what good can come out of Nazareth? This village is far too small for God, far too unworthy! Here we find a third obstacle to God's dream: our difficulty in letting ourselves be loved. Perhaps we too think that we are ordinary and unimportant people, that our towns, our villages, our region and our diocese are too small, too remote, too fragile or too impoverished. Well, whatever the wise men thought, it was from Nazareth that the Saviour of the world came. And today, he is present in our midst too!

C. A call to go together

Dear friends, this is a call to us all today. Following the Apostle Philip, I feel like saying to us: "Come and see!" Notice that he says: "come and see" and not "see and come". It is not because we have seen wonderful things that we can commit ourselves. On the contrary, it is because we go, because we set out, that we can then see the work of God! The signs of God are not given FOR us to have faith, but we become able to see them BECAUSE we have faith. They are not a reason to believe, but a confirmation in our faith.

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"Come!" It is you personally that God needs! Even today, as in the early days of the Church, we need apostles with a heart of fire! Who commit themselves in their own communities to move the world forward. This is a call for people of all generations, but, I believe, especially for our young people. Let us dare to invite them to the most fantastic adventure, that of being the disciples of Jesus. They will find a Life that is beautiful, meaningful and that does not disappoint.

"Come on, let's go!" We need to walk together! Francophones and Anglophones. With our First Nations and Métis brothers and sisters. Together! We need to walk together! We have just seen with the coming of Pope Francis to Canada that we have a long road of reconciliation ahead of us.

This reconciliation, which cannot be forced, will arrive, perhaps, for those who want it, through persevering efforts of dialogue, truth and respect, and above all with the grace of God. For my part, I intend to commit myself resolutely to this.

“Come!” There is a community of disciples, still today, very fragile, very imperfect, but gathered in Jesus! These are our journey groups, our communities, our parishes, our diocese of Hearst-Moosonee where we can meet brothers and sisters. And in our Church we all have a role to play, laity, deacons, priests and I myself as your new bishop. Let us choose to receive each other as a gift from God. I hope that we can grow in unity, in communion. A word to you, dear fellow priests and deacons: you and I have an important role to play in living this communion. I hope that we will all give it our best. And to you, dear brothers and sisters of the people of God, we need your friendship, your prayers and your support. But not just support, but rather a real collaboration for our mission.

So “come!”... “Come... and see!”

See! Truly SEE! Listen! There is beauty, brightness, even joy where we no longer expect it! This joy, this happiness, I am convinced, is given to us by Jesus, who surpasses all our expectations. In the Eucharist that we are going to celebrate, let us welcome him, the shining treasure, the glory of Israel and the light of the nations, Jesus, who lives in the most beautiful dream of all history. Let us welcome this dream into our homes, into our lives, into our diocese of Hearst-Moosonee, to live it together and to share it with the world.

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