

# Saint François de Laval



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Centre d'animation François-De Laval Newsletter



## Looking back, looking ahead

By Gilles Routhier, Superior General of the Quebec Seminary

Since April 30, various events have highlighted the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of François de Laval.<sup>1</sup> The objective was not just to honour his memory, but also to ensure that his heritage lives on in the present. This seems to me to be even more important today, as the Church in Quebec once again shifts to a missionary perspective.

François de Laval was a missionary in this vast country. Travelling on foot, on snowshoes or by canoe, in good weather and in bad, he went out to meet the inhabitants, not only presiding at services but also sharing in the life of the community for a few days. As soon as he landed in Quebec, he set out to visit his diocese and, from May to August 1681, at the age of 58, he began his longest pastoral visit to remote villages and houses, eating and sleeping in settlers' homes and sometimes even in the open air. "After a brief rest in Montreal, he returned to his canoe in the height of summer and paddled down the St. Lawrence as far as Île aux Grues and Cap-Saint-Ignace."<sup>2</sup> In two and a half months Msgr. de Laval visited 31 places and travelled over 450 km.

Going to "encounters of all kinds"— or to the edge, as we would say today— was more for him than an empty slogan. It meant being on the ground, standing with the faithful entrusted to his care, seeing people as they were, and sharing their daily lives. François de Laval bequeathed his pastoral approach. Honouring his memory, at a time when the pastoral systems developed over the past centuries have been called into question, means returning to a source that can still revive us, to pursue a **ministry that moves, a ministry that travels, a ministry that embodies, a ministry of kenosis.**

In fact, this bears a resemblance to Jesus' own ministry— a pastor, moving with his flock, entering people's homes to share their meals. It is not enough just to merge parishes or extend their boundaries. The challenge is to "streamline" the pastoral ministry. We must take to the road. ■

<sup>1</sup> See the website <https://400e.francoisdelaval.com/>

<sup>2</sup> See Newsletter no 35, *An underfunded diocese* by Martina de Vries

**The shadow thrown on the historical Seminary building symbolizes the long-lasting impact of Saint François de Laval and his work on the diocese of Quebec, which will celebrate its 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary in a few days.** Image by Cyrille-Gauvin Francoeur







# A missionary bishop

By Martina de Vries

A PAGE OF HISTORY

*The 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations were intended to highlight a specific dimension of the spiritual and apostolic heritage of Saint François de Laval: his missionary vision. This formed the basis for a talk given by Martina de Vries at the Montmartre Canadien on May 28, and also a broadcast on Radio Galilée last October. We have decided to present a summary of her presentation here, and thank her for her contribution.*

Before looking in more detail at François de Laval's missionary spirit, we need to understand how he saw missionaries. Whether in his order establishing the Quebec Seminary (1663) or in his correspondence with Rome (1658-1685), he distinguished between the priests who crossed the vast expanses of the continent to evangelize the Indigenous peoples and the priests who remained with the French population: "missionaries for the heathen as well as for the French".<sup>2</sup> It is clear that, in his view, both types were missionaries and had "the most important task of all within the Church"<sup>3</sup> and, above all, "an imperious duty to edify and to set a good example at all times."<sup>4</sup>

## "Filled with the Holy Spirit"<sup>3</sup>

In his well-known "Instructions to Missionaries" (1668), François listed the "talents of a good missionary,"<sup>3</sup> giving pride of place to the identification of and obedience to divine will. The same priority is found in the Rules for the Pupils of the Minor Seminary (1680): "Divine will, which alone is true and agreeable, must be the only guide for our perfecting and all our thoughts, words and deeds, [which] derive their excellence from compliance with divine [will], besides which there is nothing good, nothing agreeable to God, nothing perfect."<sup>5</sup>



**François crossed the ocean nine times to settle the affairs of his new Church. "I never refused, despite being exhausted by work and in poor health, to face the perils of the ocean once again."<sup>1</sup> According to historian Gilles Bureau, he spent the equivalent of one year at sea.**

**The Sacrifice d'Abraham, a painting by Daniel Abel from his collection Homage to Saint François of Quebec**

Photo : Fonds Daniel Abel

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The same rules, if not written at least inspired by Msgr. de Laval, suggested that pupils must “work to acquire all the Christian virtues”, which he then compared to the members of a large family: humility is the “foundation”; poverty is its “nurturing mother”; obedience is its “daughter”; meekness is its “cousin and faithful companion”<sup>5</sup>; and charity is so important that “where a spirit of charity is lacking, I consider that the spirit of Christ is also lacking, and without it all our labour, all our striving and all our efforts are in vain.”<sup>7</sup>

For Msgr. de Laval, a desire to achieve this objective is all that is needed to become a missionary. He selected priests not because they were perfect, but because they had the zeal needed to accomplish this inner transformation. The first Rules of the Quebec Seminary (1663) stated this clearly: “The main requirement for those who wish to be admitted to the Seminary is to have a strong, clearly recognized vocation for the ecclesiastical state (which is the foundation for all the others), a good nature open to God’s works and to the instruction they will receive, a strong desire and resolution to advance along the path of virtue and science [...] This resolution is sufficient, even though the other virtues are still but desires, since a Seminary is not made up of people who are perfect, but of people who are willing, and who work effectively, to perfect themselves.”<sup>8</sup>

### **“To become worthy instruments of God”<sup>3</sup>**

The advice given by the missionary bishop to anyone wanting to “submit to God’s wishes” and “perfect all the virtues of an apostolic missionary” was to make themselves “worthy instruments of God”, in other words to realize that the mission, evangelization and conversion are—and can only be—God’s work alone. As François put it, “conversion [...] is more the work of God than the labour of Man”<sup>3</sup>; “He must be firmly convinced that he is employed on divine, rather than human, work and that being above human forces, we can no more succeed by ourselves than a branch can bear fruit unless it be attached to the tree”<sup>9</sup>; “Jesus Christ converted fewer souls than his apostles. He orders missionaries to work to save souls, not to convert them, which is not within their power.”<sup>9</sup>



François described the community of priests at the Paris Seminary as “like a candle placed on a stand to lighten all these lands with holy doctrine and the example of your virtue. Since you are the firebrand for foreign countries, it is only reasonable that no region is not exposed to your heat and your zeal.”<sup>6</sup>

*Light from the candle*, a painting by Daniel Abel from his collection *Homage to Saint François of Quebec*

Photo : Fonds Daniel Abel

### **“Avoiding the two extremes”<sup>3</sup>**

Before accepting a candidate as a member of the community of priests at the Seminary, whether in Paris, Quebec or the Far East, Msgr. de Laval and the other founders suggested that the candidate’s vocation needed to be tested over time to ascertain whether he was endowed with the “spirit of grace” that would ensure success.

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## A missionary bishop

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A PAGE OF HISTORY

"Experience, in fact, has shown that many people, impelled by some kind of zealous piety, especially when they have a more fervent nature, throw themselves into pious works without necessarily having an attraction for them; but since in these people virtue is not deeply rooted, as soon as their initial fervor has passed, they return with their spirit broken by the very first stages in their work and look back, turning their attention away from the plough."<sup>9</sup>

Patience was required to succeed in a mission—ensuring neither a sudden conflagration nor a raging forest fire, but a steady, warming

blaze in the fireplace. The instructions for the Missionaries of Canada (1663-1665), probably co-authored by Msgr. de Laval, advised missionaries to "[...] avoid presumption and pusillanimity, the two main dangers facing those called to ensure the salvation of souls [...]. Patience must prevent a missionary from becoming discouraged if his work bears little fruit, however much he strives for success."<sup>9</sup>

### "Set a good example at all times"<sup>4</sup>

Why choose candidates for their zeal and talent, test their vocation, and

encourage them to perfect themselves? In the words of François de Laval: "to place the clergy on the soundest footing possible."<sup>2</sup> A missionary priest had to set a good example and act as a living model, inspiring others to imitate him, as he himself imitated Christ.

The Rules of the Major Seminary (c. 1682) states that "The basic notion underlying the work that is our institution's main goal defines the spirit in which it is to be conducted and ensures that its members must have nothing less than a desire to share in the apostolic spirit, since [...] their main occupation is to continuously train, by instruction and example, evangelical workers of such excellence that they deserve to be called apostolic. [...] There is no place where we are exempt from the obligation of edifying others by properly regulated conduct and by our own good example."<sup>12</sup> And the daily Order Paper (c. 1682) included a reminder that "an ecclesiastic has an imperious duty to edify and to set a good example at all times."<sup>4</sup>

The Instructions of 1663-1665 state that "There are three things a missionary must use in a successful mission: prayer, study and good example. [...] Study alone is without unction, stifles the spirit and bears no fruit. Prayer alone, without knowledge, is not enough to teach, but knowledge animated by prayer enlightens the spirit and inflames our will; and when they are accompanied by method, success is assured, unless prevented by the indifference of the people we address, as happened to Jesus Christ."<sup>9</sup>



"After landing in Quebec, I wanted to pay a personal visit to the nearby houses of the French, holding public conversations with all, conducting private conversations with some, and hearing the secrets of many."<sup>10</sup> Over the space of 50 years, François de Laval conducted 11 pastoral and general visits of his diocese.

*On foot or by canoe*, a painting by Daniel Abel from his collection *Homage to Saint François of Quebec* Photo : Fonds Daniel Abel

(Continued on page 5)



## Words backed up by actions

To set an example, our words and our actions must be consistent with each other. "In his morals, he must be irreproachable and must not allow it to be said of him, as of the Pharisees, that 'his words do not conform to his actions'."<sup>9</sup> This idea is repeated in the Instructions of 1668: "To have nothing in our lives or in our morals that appears to contradict what we say or that gives rise to indifference in the hearts and minds of the people we want to bring to God."<sup>3</sup>

In this way, Msgr. de Laval suggests that setting the example of a Christian life that can then be imitated is more effective than making long, incomprehensible speeches. For Canadian families, the Holy Family was a model for the roles of a father, mother, child and servant.

### "Win souls over to God"<sup>3</sup>

As he took up his duties as bishop, François de Laval wrote in a report to Pope Alexander VII in 1660: "Neither should we try to establish the articles of our faith through lengthy reasoning. The shortest, and clearly the most effective, way to establish our faith and imprint it in their hearts is simple exposure to the truth about God."<sup>13</sup>

It is clear that, for Msgr. de Laval, it is the missionary's conduct, rather than words, that is able to "win souls over to God." ■



**Painting of the Holy Family, preserved by the Augustinian nuns at the Hôtel-Dieu hospital in Quebec. It was created using the engravings ordered by Msgr. de Laval in 1665 for distribution to all Canadian families to provide a model of a Christian lifestyle.**

Photo : Fonds Daniel Abel

1. Letter from Laval to Clement X (March 14, 1672)
2. Order by Laval establishing the Quebec Seminary (1663)
3. Instructions from Laval to two missionaries (1668)
4. Order of the day, Major Seminary (c. 1682), probably co-authored by Laval
5. Rules of the Minor Seminary (1680), attributed to Laval
6. Letter from Laval to the Paris Seminary (August 20, 1664)
7. Letter from Laval to the Propaganda (January 13, 1660)
8. First Rules of the Quebec Seminary (1663), probably co-authored by Laval
9. Instructions for the missionaries of Canada (1663-1665), probably co-authored by Laval
10. Letter from Laval to Alexander VII (July 31, 1659)
11. Instructions from the Propaganda to apostolic vicars (1659), probably used by Laval as a model
12. Rules of the Major Seminary (c. 1682), probably co-authored by Laval
13. Report from Laval to the Propaganda (1660)





# Photo album

## Temporary exhibition

### *Laval, a missionary bishop in New France*

In addition to its permanent exhibition, the Centre temporarily became a museum, recording 93,054 visitors. They came to see some rarely-exhibited artefacts from the life of François de Laval, thanks to the outstanding collaboration of the Musée de la civilisation, the Centre and the Musée Notre-Dame.



## Travelling exhibition

### *Homage to Saint François of Quebec*

Artist Daniel Abel has always been fascinated by the missionary bishop and has created a series of paintings that attempt to capture various facets of his personality. The result is a collection of 25 original works, of which 14 were viewed by over 147,000 visitors.



## Virtual exhibition

The Musée de la civilisation has made two exhibitions available on its website: *François, premier évêque de Québec* and *10 faits insolites sur François de Laval*.



## Anima

The Quebec Seminary was pleased to contribute in the form of *Anima*: an online, digital documentary archive entirely devoted to François de Laval. Long may his memory live. [sfdl.omeka.net](http://sfdl.omeka.net)



We thank Daniel Abel and Jacques Gourde for their photographic coverage of the events.





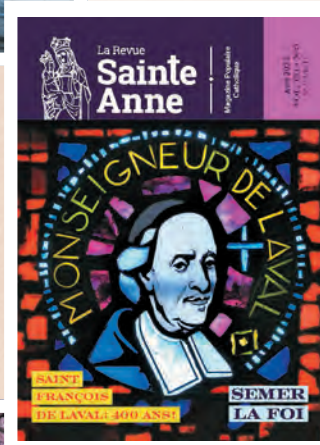
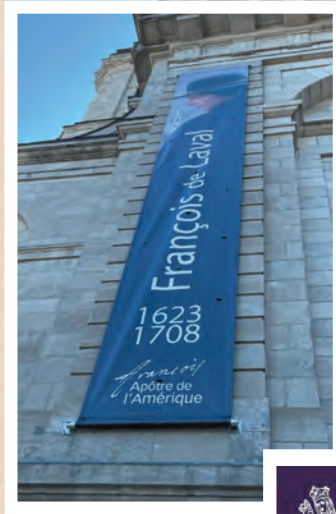
# 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary

# kto

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## Information – training – testimony

There have been multiple opportunities to find out more about François de Laval, whether in articles in the *Revue Sainte Anne* (Vol. 151, no 3), on Radio Galilée (*De fil en aiguille* and *Vision d'histoire*), in a new documentary on ECDQ.tv (*François de Laval, un homme qui a changé le visage du Québec*), a report on KTO, an AI-assisted animation (*Sacrées Rencontres*) for tourists during the summer, and talks at the Maison de François by Sister Doris Lamontagne, at the Montmartre Canadien by Martina de Vries, and at the Soeurs de la Charité de Saint-Louis in Lévis by Jean Duval.



## Faith and festivities

There were multiple opportunities to learn and celebrate. At the annual convention of the *Catholic Women's League*, attended by almost 1,100 people, at the gathering of the *Association étudiante catholique de l'Université Laval* and the exhibition *Qui suis-je*, at the retreat led by Abbé Jacques Gourde at the Major Seminary, at the confirmation ceremony of the parish of Saint-François-de-Laval in Quebec, and during the visit of priests from the Syro-Malabar diocese, among others.



## And it's not over yet!!!

If you would like to see photos or videos again, listen to broadcasts, read the *Revue Sainte Anne*, or download a workshop guide, the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary website will stay online until the end of December at [400e.francoisdelaval.com](http://400e.francoisdelaval.com). You can reserve the reliquary or travelling exhibition at any time.







Photograph taken by Cyrille-Gauvin Francoeur to design the visual signature for the celebrations surrounding the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of François de Laval

ICONOGRAPHY

## François de Laval, the first bishop of Quebec

In 1708, after the death of Msgr. de Laval, Abbé Henri-Jean Tremblay, the Quebec Seminary's procurator in Paris, ordered a matrix from the engraver Claude Duflos. He probably based his engraving on a portrait of the bishop painted around 1674 and kept at Château Chamblac in Normandy (below). The engravings made from the matrix finally arrived in Canada in 1710 and, despite their wide distribution, only a few copies survive. The matrix bears a mirror image of the image appearing on the paper copies.

Claude Duflos (1665-1727), engraving *François de Laval, premier évêque de Québec, 1708.*

Engraving on laid paper, 25.1 cm x 18.1 cm.  
Musée de la civilisation, collection Séminaire de Québec 1993.15131

Photo : Musée de la civilisation



QUOTE

### Laval and the house built on the rock

*Because I believed there was no better way to lay out the foundation for the Quebec Church than to strengthen everything, correctly and solidly, in such a way that it cannot be destroyed by the passage of time [...]*

Letter from Msgr. de Laval to Pope Innocent XI (Quebec, November 13, 1678)