



«« THE WONDERFUL MISSION OF THE PRIEST »»



Bishop François Thibodeau, C.J.M.

- I – « You Have Seduced Me, O Lord, and You Have Prevailed! »
- II – Different Titles, but the Same Mission
- III – Indispensable Mission
- IV – Defining the Priest More by His « Being » Than by His « Doing »
- V – New Priests... for 2010
- VI – New Evangelisers

Pastoral Letter of Bishop François Thibodeau, C.J.M. of Edmundston
January 9, 2003

Dear Brothers in the Priesthood,

My Pentecost, 2002 pastoral letter on the mission of love that is ours deeply impressed and challenged me. Thirty-five priests shared their vocation journey. The call of the Lord has resounded in our lives; does it not still resound today?

On this anniversary date of my episcopal ordination I want to write to you to reiterate my love for you all, to express my deep gratitude for all that you are in our beloved Church of Edmundston, and to mark the highlight the wonderful mission which is ours day in, day out.

Excerpts from the liturgy of the Apostles, we could very well make our own the following words:

“The call of the Lord has launched us on our way.
Nourished by his Word and enriched by his love,
we bring joy to those who listen to us and welcome us.
Wonder of wonders, he discloses the Father’s secrets.
Messengers of the Good News, we are heralds of peace.
Modelled by the Word of God, the Spirit animates us.
Praised be our God for Holy Church, the Body of Christ that we are.
Praised be our God for His Word, our light and our joy.
Praised be God for baptism and reconciliation proclaimed in faith.
Praised be our God for the Eucharist, our strength and our life.”

The conciliar decree *Christus Dominus* on the pastoral charge of bishops, promulgated October 28, 1965, reminds us that “all priests, whether diocesan or religious, share and exercise with the bishop the one priesthood of Christ. They are thus constituted providential cooperators of the episcopal order. The diocesan clergy have, however, a primary role in the care of souls because, being incardinated in or appointed to a particular church, they are wholly dedicated in its service to the care of a particular section of the Lord’s flock, and accordingly form one priestly body and one family of which the bishop is the father. [...] The relations between the bishop and the diocesan clergy should be based before all else on supernatural charity, so that their unity of purpose will make their pastoral activity more effective. Therefore, to ensure an increasingly effective apostolate, the bishops should be willing to engage in dialogue with his priests, individually and collectively, not only occasionally, but if possible, regularly. Furthermore, the diocesan priests should be united among themselves and should be genuinely zealous for the spiritual welfare of the whole diocese” (no. 28).

My dear brother-priests, within this relationship context asked for by the Council Fathers and strongly desired

by presbyteral councils, allow me to raise two important points of our priestly life about which we could share as brothers: our wonderful mission in the Church, and our hope for priestly vocations. I hope that these reflections be like guideposts for future meetings, whether of the priests' senate, clergy meetings, or presbyteral teams. However, without losing sight of the questions asked at the end of the 2002 pastoral letter, let us once again listen read a few excerpts of our priests sharing about their vocation journey.

I - "You have seduced me, O Lord, and you have prevailed!"

"I chose what seemed to be meant for me, and I have never for a moment regretted it. I have always been truly happy in my priestly vocation. And I still am!" GD

"Religious education at every level has always been my concern, and I consider it the most precious heritage of my ministry." RA

"You must trust in God and His divine mercy. It is His unconditional love which makes this vocation irresistible." GB

"Allow me to say that I have never regretted answering the Lord's call." BB

"It is not always easy to discern God's ways. I see better, now, how the Lord has led me, and I can only thank Him for having chosen me." CC

"Lord, this treasure you were handing me I would have to, like everyone else, carry in a 'vessel of clay'." ED

"Looking back on my journey, I am convinced that it was really the Lord who called me. However, the ways of the Lord are very mysterious!" RD

"I thank the lord for having chosen me and sustained me through all those years when I have had in my heart the joy of working for Him!" ED

"I thank God for the thousands of people I have met, who were like 'guardian angels' to me." GD

"Lord, develop in us the conviction that the Church cannot effectively carry on its mission without devoted pastors to guide it, and witnesses to inspire it." CD

"Pray for priestly vocations, in your prayers." NG

"True happiness, for a human being, is striving each day to do the will of God." NG

"I believe that I have learned to 'bloom where the Lord has planted me,' and this, I believe, is the secret for being happy along the path the Lord has set us on." LG

"It is difficult to find the specific cause of my vocation to the priesthood." UL

"A priest's life is a mystery, the mystery of God communicated to humans to bring them what is essential to life: love." AL

"My heart was drawn to a mysterious treasure, a treasure offered to me. I took it and it has been my greatest wealth ever since." GL

"Throughout my ministry I have had great consolations and known great joy. Trials and illness have bolstered my faith and given my serving greater impetus." LL

"Today as during my priestly formation, I keep hearing these words which helped me persevere, and which still strongly challenge me: 'Do not fear! Do not be afraid! Follow me!'" BM

"I have been a happy priest despite the trials I have had. I now see myself - without regret - as one of a dying breed. Priests tomorrow will be different." CM

"I believe that the Holy Spirit graced my parents with faith and generosity which were fertile ground for the growth of my vocation." LN

"It is in a spirit of total availability to serving Christ and his people that I shall continue to exercise my priestly ministry wherever I am." JNPM

"God's call is so discrete, so intimate, personal, and often unconscious, that it is difficult to relate its unfolding." AO

"Even if I wasn't able to do what my young priest's heart so desired, I can state that no one can surpass God in generosity." PP

"The Last Supper, where Jesus shows his love, is at times difficult to grasp, but it always boils down to love, love, love... Love is the essence of the priestly vocation." AP

"At my ordination I felt immense joy at having placed my trust in the Lord Jesus who had called me to follow him, to serve my brothers and sisters." FP

"If I am a priest today it is because of the Christian atmosphere in the family where I grew up. My father and mother were the first to talk to me of vocation." WR

"I have always loved my work and the lifestyle I chose, and I thank God." GS

"It is by opening up to the Lord and to those around you that you will experience joy." IT

"There is, in Jeremiah, this word of God which summarises my vocation: 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you...'" JT

"One's vocation story can be sealed only at the end of one's life!" RT

"Thank you, Lord, for having needed me for so long, and for having confidence in me." ST

"I have never doubted my call, I feel confirmed in my vocation... and am happy to be a priest!" PT

II - Different Titles, but the Same Mission

The many changes that have occurred in our Church and our country have greatly modified the "status" given to our clergy. Pastoral restructuring has also contributed in changing the picture we had of these men who were seen as "unique and special," and around whom the Church's life turned. The unfortunate events about which some priests here, in the United States, and other countries have been found guilty, had their share in blackening the image people had of consecrated men, and in some places destroying the trust they had in them. However, we must repeat again that the Church of Christ cannot exist without a priesthood, without holy priests. We must together rediscover the priest's wonderful mission which is altogether dedicated to proclaiming the Word of God, and to promoting holiness and unity yet to be achieved.

Priest-Missionaries

Many years elapsed before the diocese experienced around 1970 an unprecedented number of priests - over a hundred, in its territory - although this period was short-lived. Around 1860-1870, there were only seven priests for all of northern New Brunswick. But then, there were hardly any people, either. Saint Basile was erected as a parish in 1792, Saint François, in 1859, Grand Falls, in 1868, Saint Hilaire, in 1869, and Saint Ann at Maliseet, in 1870. The priests then were "missionaries" who covered long distances on foot, or by horseback or canoe. Where there were rectories, priests would settle down for a while, but their missionary spirit sent them to new communities. In this way new communities and places of worship were founded. Between 1872 and 1886, Maliseet was served by both Saint Basile and Saint Léonard; in 1919, the parish of Saint Joseph was served by Edmundston. Priests from Drummond cared for the people in Southern Victoria. Thanks to them, the Franciscans came and ministered in the region for some 75 years. Other congregations, too, such as the Holy Cross and the Eudist Fathers, contributed to the erection of a few of our parishes, both in the Tobique and in the Upper Madawaska. In 1904, three Eudist fathers came to minister in the Tobique.

Priest-Colonisers, Priest-Pastors

It is thanks to priest-colonisers that the Restigouche missions developed between 1910 and 1925. Father Arthur Melanson who hailed from Balmoral, gave us the parishes of Très-Saint-Sacrement in Saint Quentin and Notre-Dame-des-Prodiges in Kedgwick. He was succeeded by remarkable priests who picked up the challenge of developing communities. This is how Father Melanson's young assistant, Father Eudore Martin had to look at

building the church, rectory, and school, and supervise the clearing of land needed for putting up these buildings. In her book *Petite histoire paroissiale*, Mrs. Germaine Bergeron-Fournier writes: "The apostle of Jesus Christ was never discouraged. His was the strength of the Almighty, and the harder the task, more did his trust in God develop." Gradually these priest-colonisers were given the traditional titles of "pastor" and "curate."

Priest-Educators, Priest-Chaplains

As the number of priests increased, pastoral work became more diversified. Over one hundred priest-educators passed through Université Saint-Louis in Edmundston, the first twenty-five years of its existence. Several religious communities had their own chaplain: the Religious Hospitallers of Saint Joseph had a chaplain by 1920. The Marist Sisters and the Blessed Sacrament Sisters also had their own chaplain. Thanks to the Catholic Action Movement, several priests served as youth chaplains and chaplains to agricultural workers; several priests joined the Canadian military as chaplains. There were also school chaplains, hospital chaplains, and chaplains to municipal services. Each group or association prided itself in having its own priest chaplain. Today, the Knights of Columbus and the Daughters of Isabella still ask for a chaplain for their members.

Priest-Moderators

The new Code of Canon Law (1983) introduced us to a new "type" of priest: in pastoral teams ministering to the needs of a parish, the priest who is a member of that team is called the "moderator," and he is the link with the diocesan bishop. The legal term "moderator" is quite foreign to us in the Church. The Code uses the word a number of times to designate the person in authority in a religious institute, congregation, or society. In a pastoral team, the bishop must appoint a priest to serve as moderator of pastoral ministry, a priest who has the juridical powers of a pastor even though he is not such in a strict sense (canon 517, § 2). That is why we have had for three years now, fifteen priests of our presbyterium who are "moderators." Church legislation provides that due to a shortage of priests, the bishop may deem it necessary that the pastoral charge be confided to a community of persons.

Priest-Evangelisers

Through our historical evolution we can distinguish the main characteristics of each of these "types" of priests, but what is essential and universal to them all is the passionate love of Christ Jesus and his Gospel which moved these men to bring to those in their care the Good News of the Gospel. Nothing could curb their enthusiasm, in days past, and nothing can stop the zeal of all the priest-evangelisers today. We are certain, even as we carry a treasure in vessels of clay, that nothing can separate us from the love of God. "God's flock is in your midst; give it a shepherd's care. Watch over it willingly as God would have you do, not under constraint, and not for shameful profit either, but generously. Be examples to the flock, not lording it over those assigned to you" (1 Peter 5:2-4).

III - Indispensable Mission

Throughout the 350 years of Church history in our region - the first Mass in the Madawaska region was celebrated by Father Gabriel Drouillette, S.J., in the summer of 1651 - priests were missionaries, then colonisers, pastors, curates or assistant pastors, educators, and chaplains. There are presently thirty-nine priests in our region. Fifteen are "moderators" of parish pastoral teams, five are chaplains in hospitals, convents, retirement homes, of the correctional institute; the others are involved in regular or occasional parish ministry. A few of them have had to give up ministry altogether, due to illness or old age. The more priest shortage is felt, the more do we feel the consequences of the gradual decrease in the number of men who fashioned our religious milieu and even our personal lives. We must therefore rediscover the indispensable mission of the priest in our world today, and to react against their eventual disappearance.

A Response to Needs

Far from being some vague kind of "sentimental" feeling, the priestly vocation is first and foremost a response to the needs of the Church. Countless times the call has been made by parents and educators, priests and religious, but it is the bishop's call which "ratifies" God's choice of a particular person to respond to the Church's many needs. "With the help of the Lord Jesus Christ, our God and Saviour, we choose him for the order of priests," the bishop pronounces at the beginning of an ordination. From the very first moments of my coming to you I have not ceased repeating this pressing and necessary call.

Loving Witnesses

The Church is always in need of pastors according to the heart of God. Our population has a deep desire to

have such pastors, attentive and concerned with their well-being, and it recognises them. Whether these priests be young or old, the same condition is required by Jesus the Good Shepherd, that each priest devote his life to help feed God's people in love. Just as he asked Peter, Jesus asks each priest, at every season and every day of his life: "George, Ivan, Roger, Pierre, François, do you love me?... Feed my sheep!" Three times Jesus asked Peter whether he truly loved him... He can ask the same question to every priest more than once. It may be that fatigue, failures, and loneliness diminish this love. Every priest must then get a hold of himself and reach beyond the intensity of his first love, just as loving couples are not satisfied with half-measures. Besides, it is to the extent that one is inflamed with Christ that he will be a good shepherd, whether he be 30, 60, or even 80 years old! More than a title or a function - pastor, moderator, or collaborator - the shepherd is the bearer of a love which years cannot extinguish. It is important that the baptised appreciate, respect, and love the priests that the Lord has set along their path. Priests are called to be witnesses to the Father's love made known in His Son Jesus. Through Holy Orders priests are configured to Christ the Good Shepherd and Head of his Church.

Demanding Commitments

To help us better realise the greatness of the priest's mission I suggest that you reconsider the commitments we freely made at our ordination, answering yes with generosity to the questions of the consecrating bishop:

– Are you resolved, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to discharge without fail the office of priesthood in the presbyteral order as a conscientious fellow worker with the bishops in caring for the Lord's flock?

– Are you resolved to celebrate the mysteries of Christ faithfully and religiously as the Church has handed them down to us for the glory of God and the sanctification of Christ's people?

– Are you resolved to exercise the ministry of the word wisely, preaching the gospel and explaining the Catholic faith?

– Are you resolved to consecrate your life to God for the salvation of his people, and to unite yourself more closely every day to Christ the High Priest, who offered himself for us to the Father as a perfect sacrifice?

– Do you promise respect and obedience to me and my successors?

These five commitments are major reference points for the priest's entire life, totally dedicated to prayer and the Word of God, whether in parish or hospital ministry, whether retired or not, in sickness and in health. Before performing a pastoral, liturgical, or sacramental task, our very life itself is prayer and Word: through the sacrament of Holy Orders we become "sacraments" of Jesus Christ, signs of his presence, signs of his love.

Source of Invigorating Love

If it is indispensable for the priest to be a witness in deepest love with Christ, it is important that this love be continually renewed by the bonds uniting the priest with his neighbour, and first and foremost with his bishop and brother priests. This is one of the proofs of the authenticity of his love and even of his mission. These words of Sain John are a measure of this authenticity: "One who has no love for the brother he has seen cannot love the God he has not seen" (1 John 4:20). These words are meant for all of Christ's disciples, and especially for priests. If a priest were to - God forbid! - speak ill of his bishop or of a brother priest, he would destroy himself and his very ministry. Communion with one's bishop and the fraternity of priests is the life line of all priestly ministry. It is the source of fruitful ministry and a sign of hope.

"Love your priests!"

At the time of the renewal of priestly commitments at the Chrism Mass, the priest addresses the people in this way: "My brothers and sisters, pray for your priests. Ask the Lord to bless them with the fullness of his love, to help them be faithful ministers of Christ the High Priest, so that they will be able to lead you to him, the fountain of your salvation. Pray also for me, that despite my own unworthiness I may faithfully fulfill the office of apostle which Jesus Christ has entrusted to me. Pray that I may become more like our High Priest and Good Shepherd, the teacher and servant of all."

IV - Defining the Priest more by His "Being" than by His "Doing"

After having briefly summarised with you the chief characteristics of the priests of our Church, these past 350 years, and after having considered the demanding commitments we made before God out of unconditional love of Christ, I would like to look more closely not only at the task before us but especially at the "being" we have become.

“Good luck, dear Father!”

In his book *Guide des difficultés de la foi catholique* [“Guide to Difficulties of the Catholic Faith”], Father Pierre Descouvremont describes with a bit of humour the situation of the clergy of his country, but who among us has not experienced the following:

“If he preaches longer than ten minutes...
He is long-winded!

“If he speaks of contemplation...
His head is in the clouds!
If he raises social issues...
He is a leftist!

“If he works for a living...
It is because he has nothing to do!
If he works in the parish...
He is cut off from the world!

If he baptises and marries everyone...
He degrades the sacraments!
If he is more demanding...
He is only interested in a lily-white Church!

If he stays in the rectory...
He doesn't see anyone!
If he visits the people...
He's never at home!

If he is good with the children...
His religion is childish!

If he visits the sick...
He has time to waste,
and he goes around the problems of the day!

If he repairs the church..
He throws money out he window!
If he does nothing...
He is letting things deteriorate!

If he works with his parish council...
He is being led by the nose!
If he has no council...
He is individualistic!

If he smiles easily...
He is too intimate with others!
If due to distraction he fails to recognise someone...
He is too aloof!

If he is young...
He lacks experience!
If he is old...
He ought to retire!

And Father Descouvremont concludes: “Good luck, dear Father!”

We could add on to this list of grievances: it is not easy to fulfill everyone's expectations and give all the services they would like to have. The Lord who has called the priests to his service knew beforehand the limitations of his servants, even those of his holiest and most devoted followers. This was the “price” he paid for the instruments he picked!

"Being" is More Important than "Doing"

In his wonderful pastoral letter *Messengers of Joy*, Cardinal Godfried Danneels, Archbishop of Malines-Brussels, asserts that there has been a lot of talk about priests, in the last few years, and quite a bit has been written, too. There are even differing approaches to the priesthood. Everyone offers his own definition of the priesthood. The sociologist describes the place which the priest occupies in society, his role, and explains how he functions. The psychologist is interested in the priest's feelings and considers his subjective environment, his motives, and his psychological problems. "What is a priest? We try too often to define him according to what he does: his actions determine his being. This is true, but it only skims the surface and does not really touch the reality of the priest. Besides, priests do many things which could be done just as well by others. As a matter of fact, in times of shortage others take up the tasks usually performed by priests, and this is good: religious brothers and sisters, deacons, pastoral agents, lay volunteers. If we wish to define the priest by what he does but cannot be done by others, there remain but few residual functions, however irreplaceable they be to the community: the Eucharist and the sacrament of Reconciliation. The priest is then reduced to a skeleton! As a matter of fact, the priest cannot be defined solely by what he alone can do." We must consider his distinctive ministry in relation to other ministries and offices in the Church. Far from viewing others as trespassers, the priest must promote these ministries and exercise pastoral leadership. The priest must really be defined by what he is, and this can hardly be grasped without faith. The priest's being is invisible. To understand him, he must be viewed from the viewpoint of God, of Christ, and of the Church.

Gratitude and Admiration

Allow me to offer you once again, dear brother priests, the song I composed on the occasion of my twenty-fifth anniversary of priestly ordination, as a gesture of gratitude and admiration for you. The song focusses on the wonderful being of the priest.

Beloved of God,
be everywhere "messenger of the Most High,"
since our Saviour, the Blessed One of the Father,
has chosen you today to teach his people.

Beloved of God,
be everywhere "shepherd of the flock,"
since our Saviour, the Supreme Shepherd,
has called you today to gather his people.

Beloved of God,
be everywhere "praise to the Lord,"
since our Saviour, the Praying One of the Father,
begs you today to comfort his people.

Beloved of God,
be everywhere a "perfect offering to the Lord,"
since our Saviour, the eternal High Priest,
has consecrated you today to sanctify his people.

Beloved of God,
be everywhere "Eucharist of the Lord,"
since our Saviour, the true Bread of Life,
gave up his body and blood as nourishment for his people.

V - New Priests... for 2010

Unless something unforeseen happens, I do not believe that I shall be ordaining new priests for the Diocese of Edmundston before 2010 at the earliest... I know that nothing is impossible to God, that he can raise new collaborators in totally novel ways. However, if we earnestly set to work immediately, we have a chance that a few young men begin theological studies shortly, that they do their pastoral internship... and be ordained in 2010.

What Can We Do?

We must first realise the Church's urgent needs and the lack of priestly resources necessary to fulfill these needs. We cannot rely on the image projected by vast gatherings or the celebration of funerals with many priests participating! We cannot trust appearances! In our own diocese it is no longer possible to ensure

Sunday Mass in every parish of the Southern Victoria deanery, and we must alternate with liturgies of the Word, to celebrate the Lord's Day. If there are only two priests for Southern Victoria's eight parishes, there are also only two priests for the four Restigouche parishes, and three priests for the six Upper Madawaska parishes. It bears repeating that in the entire territory of the diocese there are only thirty-nine priests. The average age of the priests in the diocese is 65.2 years. In ten years, of the nineteen priests actually ministering in parishes (fourteen diocesan and five religious priests), only ten of them will be below the age of 70...

"Pray the Master..."

The Lord's instruction is still timely: we must pray the Master to send workers to the harvest. But it seems to me that before all else, we must thank him for all the Gospel workers he has given our Church, especially for all those priests who gave the best of themselves and who still devote themselves to us. If we cannot appreciate what today's priests are accomplishing in our respective communities, how can we lift our hearts to the Lord in prayer? In this trusting prayer we can ask forgiveness for not having always collaborated with our priests, for having spoken ill of them, for not having encouraged our youth to serve the Church... Prayer is a demanding exercise, it must be true and honest. And if I ask God to pick candidates for the priesthood from among our faithful, I must be ready as a young person to say yes to the calling of the Lord; I must be ready, as a parent, to accept that the Lord may ask a child of mine for such a service. And as a priest, I must accept that the Lord choose one of my parishioners, and I must be ready to accompany him on his way, through prayer and example... our personal and community life will then be one filled with hope and trust in the Lord. Nothing prevents us from celebrating intercessory masses for vocations.

Seeking Vocations to the Priesthood

After much prayer, it is important to look at those around us, the youth and older people. We must look for people who seem to have leadership qualities, capable of facilitating and leading the community with wisdom and discernment, people who appear to be people of faith, of prayer and of hope, people who can devote themselves generously to their group, people with good health who wish for a successful life of service to their brothers and sisters, and people who have the intellectual capacity for doing theological studies. The Lord who sows generously for the coming harvest has already chosen those he wishes for his service; all we have to do is to discover them! Let us not be afraid: those he called at baptism and confirmation have been sealed with the Holy Spirit! The gifts of wisdom, strength, counsel, filial adoration are there, doing their work in those who have been called.

Talking among Ourselves

It would be good for parishioners to talk among themselves about those - youth and adults alike - who, in their estimation, could become priests. This could bring happy surprises, startling news. My predecessor once challenged the Maliseet community on this, and there was a beautiful response. It could happen - and I am sure that it will - that a parish community, through its parish pastoral council, or its religious education or liturgy committees, decide on one person. The pastor or any delegated person would then meet with the designated one to discuss the matter of priestly vocation with him. It could well be that the young person or adult will not remain indifferent to this: "Our community believes that you could very well be a priest, someday..." This undertaking must be made as discretely as possible, because in certain places and at a certain age a young person cannot mention his desire for the priesthood without being mocked and even ridiculed. If there is a positive response, it would be important to contact the diocesan vocation office or to raise the subject with the bishop. And then, if there are enough people to warrant such a step, a vocation weekend could be organised or, at least a friendly meeting of those concerned, with the bishop.

Fertile Soil of the Family

In my 2002 Pentecost pastoral letter, thirty-five priests wrote about their vocation journey. Very few are those who did not mention their own family as the first element of their vocation. We must repeat it with pride and gratitude: it is within our own family that our vocation grew. The love that was there, the trusting prayer to God and the charity on which the family was built, these were the elements which helped many future priests respond to God's call. I myself have great confidence in these sharings between parents and children, in family-based religious education meetings. Parents who love Jesus and who are not shy about expressing their faith with enthusiasm are major agents of vocational discernment and support. These meetings cannot do otherwise than promote the invitation of Christ Jesus himself.

VI - New Evangelisers

"New evangelization needs new evangelisers and these are the priests who are serious about living their

priesthood as a specific path toward holiness. To accomplish this it is fundamentally important that every priest rediscover the absolute need for personal sanctity. Before purifying others, they must purify themselves; to instruct others they must be instructed; they have to become light in order to illuminate and become close to God in order to bring others closer to Him; they have to be sanctified in order to sanctify. This commitment is made concrete in a profound unity of life which leads the priest to be and live as another Christ in all the circumstances of his life. The faithful in the parish and those who collaborate in various pastoral activities see, observe, feel, and listen not only when the Word of God is preached but also when the liturgy is celebrated, especially the Mass, when they are received in the parochial office (which should be comfortable and welcoming); when they visit his home and they rejoice in his simplicity and priestly poverty; when they talk with him and discuss common interests and are comforted by his spiritual outlook, his courtesy and his behaviour in treating humble people with priestly nobility. The grace and charity of the Altar are diffused at the ambo, in the confessional, in the schools and oratories, in the homes of the faithful, in the streets and at the hospitals, on public transport and in the media. The priest has an opportunity to fulfill his role as Pastor everywhere. In every instance it is his Mass which is diffused. His spiritual union with Christ, Priest and Host, causes him to be the grain of God that is to become the true bread of Christ – as St. Ignatius of Antioch says - for the good of the brethren.” May our whole lives proclaim The love of God is from age to age! May the Virgin Mary, in this Year of the Rosary, help us fully experience the joyous, sorrowful, glorious, and luminous mysteries that are part of our daily lot in life.

+ François Thibodeau

+ François Thibodeau, C.J.M.
Bishop of Edmundston

To Pursue our Reflection and Prayer

1. “Christ’s servant and steward, faithful worker in the building up of his body.” What would be the main elements to closely study, in reflecting on the mission of the priest today? Confronted with today’s controversies, which elements should be presented more often?
2. “Ever faithful to the will of God, so that our ministry and our lives give glory to Christ.” if it is true that we must stress “being” over “doing,” it is nonetheless necessary to be aware of our daily actions. What is your evaluation of your daily actions? Are they mostly focussed on the Word to be proclaimed and Prayer to be ensured? Are the tasks requested by the bishop or the people insufficient, too many, or appropriate?
3. “That you may bless, sanctify and consecrate the one you have called.” In this reflection on “the being of the priest,” what qualities of “pastoral being” would you like to see the most, in our priests?
4. “May he be faithful in working with the order of bishops, so that the words of the Gospel may reach the ends of the earth.” In our diocese, are the priests perceived as being united with one another? As all working at the same evangelisation? As being one with their bishop? What is the witness given by our priests, generally?
5. “Renew within them the Spirit of holiness.” How can we effectively help one another live our mission of prayer and evangelisation? How can we maintain our apostolic zeal alive and burning?
6. “In his love Christ chooses those who are to share in his ministry.” How would you qualify your love for Christ? Lukewarm? Ordinary? Burning?
7. “They are to dedicate themselves to serving your people, nourish it with your Word, and make it live through your sacraments” For you, is the presence of a priest among our people as wanted, interesting, necessary, and even indispensable as in times past?
8. “They shall be true witnesses of faith and charity, ready to sacrifice their lives for your glory and the salvation of the world.” What would you be willing to do to ensure new vocations to the priesthood?
9. “Protect your gifts in him, that he may increase by your power what he has received from your grace.” Which youth and adults recently met would you be ready to recommend as future priests in our Church?
10. “May he always sustain you with his grace, that you may faithfully fulfill your ministry as priest.” What prayer could you offer to the Lord, at this time?

- Austin Flannery, Gen. Ed., Vatican Council II. The Basic Sixteen Documents... in Inclusive Language. Northport/Dublin, Costello/Dominican Publications, 1996, pp. 301-302.

© Diocese of Edmundston. All rights reserved.