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## PRIESTS IN A CHANGING CHURCH AND SOCIETY

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In the letter I wrote to the priests on March 25, I told them of my deep gratitude: it would be very difficult if not well-nigh impossible to carry out my ministry, were it not for their round-the-clock presence throughout the year. For more than two years now I have gotten to know them better, and I want to tell them how much I admire their zeal and generosity in carrying out their daily ministry. The Lord, the Good Shepherd alone knows what it is costing them, to carry out their ministry on a day-to-day basis. And what holiness is required, one that must continue to grow in prayer and in charity.

### IN THE MIDST OF CHANGE

I wrote the following, to the priests: « Do not fear for the present nor the future. The ministry confided to you on the day of your ordination remains essentially unchanged despite the many changes that have occurred in your personal lives, within your Christian communities, and in the world as a whole. The priest's ministry has remained the same: 'To be a faithful collaborator with the order of bishops, so that the words of the Gospel may reach the ends of the earth. » This is basically the reason why priests are ordained by bishops: so that they be their faithful collaborators. This is the priest's mission, the primary meaning of his ordination. The priest's mission cannot be understood apart from that of the bishop. That is the reason why no priest can be a 'vagus,' a nomad. He is necessarily the bishop's faithful collaborator. This implies deep and mutual bonds that must exist between a priest and his bishop. They are more than the bonds existing between employers and employees. They are bonds created by sacred ordination, bonds of life and mission, bonds of faith, hope and charity, bonds of obedience and fidelity; would the breaking or modifying of bonds as basic as these not also destroy the priest's *raison d'être*? He is the bishop's faithful collaborator; it is for this that he was ordained. If there were no fidelity nor collaboration, what sense would ordination have? It would be difficult to find any. I squarely affirm this, but it is not that I have found fault among our clergy, in this area. Quite the opposite: I assert this to indicate my gratitude to all these priests who have given and still consecrate their daily lives to the cause of Christ and his Church.

### ONLY FOR THAT...

The bishop's mission is very broad, heavy, and demanding; so is that of the priest. Just recall the commitments the bishop makes at his episcopal ordination, and you will understand that the bishop, whatever his age, his state of health or his actual work has to carry this episcopal mission with himself until his death. Because of his ordination, the priest too will have to collaborate with his bishop until death, to proclaim the Gospel of Christ faithfully and without cease, to keep the deposit of the faith in its integrity according to the Tradition handed down from the apostles, to work at the building up of the Body of Christ which is the Church, and to remain united to it under the authority of Peter's successor and in obedience to him, to care for the people of God like a father, to guide it along the way to salvation, to lovingly welcome in the name of the Lord all those who are in need, to search out the lost sheep in order to bring them back into the sheepfold, to pray without cease for the people of God... these are a few of the obligations incurred by the bishop at the time of his ordination. The *Code of Canon Law* and the *Directory of Bishops* specify other pastoral responsibilities. The priest who is his bishop's faithful collaborator has no fear of unemployment!

## **CLOSELY ASSOCIATED TO THE EPISCOPAL MINISTRY**

The ministry here confided to diocesan priests especially pertained to parish communities, but as you can see by the long list of bishop's tasks, the parish ministry does not exhaust the collaboration that is needed. Even beyond retirement age, an equal collaboration and fidelity are required, but in new ways. Even if countless lay people - especially pastoral agents - are involved in the Church's mission, we must affirm that priests, because of their ordination which makes them their bishop's collaborators, in deep respect for all new ministries and services emerging in the Church, must still carry out their own mission by closely collaborating with their bishop in proclaiming the Word, in prayer, in celebrating the sacraments and in governing the people of God according to the legislation of the universal Church and the Church of Edmundston.

## **BONDS OF RECIPROCITY**

In stressing the very essence of priestly ordination it is possible for us to rediscover the vital bonds that unite us to one another. For my part, intimate bonds join me to this beloved Church of Edmundston, hence to each member of the presbyterium. And the same can be said of every priest, regarding me. At a time when we are searching for the deep meaning of life, it appears to me that by restating the basic meaning of priestly ordination we are also reaffirming the greatness, depth and breadth of such a life and such a mission centred on Christ, on his Gospel, and on his Church. On this the thirty-first anniversary of my priestly ordination, I want to pray for all who have helped me become a priest and all those I have had the pleasure of encountering throughout my ministry. I hope that the above reflections may guide you along the path we must follow in the midst of today's many changes. On these days of celebration, commitment, and searching, my wish is that we remain faithful to God the Father who calls us in His Son by the gift of the Spirit; it is also that we remain faithful to the Church mission given us to carry out in the world, that of welcoming like Jesus the Good Shepherd every man, woman and child who approaches us. Let us be attentive to the Word we read, and to the teaching of the Church in which we have believed. May we live the Gospel we proclaim and teach. May we humbly and daily live in peace and joy, in holiness and justice, in steadfastness and eagerness this gift of God, the gift of Jesus for the life of the world. Have a good week.

*+ François Thibodeau*

+ François Thibodeau, C.J.M.

Bishop of Edmundston

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