
THE GRACE OF THE DIACONATE



On November 14, 1999 I had the pleasure of ordaining Ivan Thériault to the diaconate. This was a grace-filled event not only for the new deacon but also for our Church. The service accomplished in time by Jesus himself will be extended among us. Jesus, servant of servants, continues to serve his people today through the ministers he gives his Church.

SERVICE TO THE POOR

In calling Ivan to the diaconate I asked him to have throughout his life, like Jesus did, a very special concern for our needy and destitute brothers and sisters. The many talents the Lord has given Ivan are meant in a very special way to be at the service of the poor, to bring them freedom and make them happy. Happy the faithful servant, the Lord gives him the maintenance of his house; he requires Ivan's vigilance, his faithfulness, his entire being. In return, the Lord shall return one hundredfold what Ivan will have done for him.

A DEMANDING CHARGE

It was a demanding charge that I addressed to the new deacon; it echoes Jesus' demand when he says that whatever we have done to the least of his brothers has been done to him: "I was hungry, I was thirsty, I was sick, I was naked, I was a stranger, I was in prison... and you came to me." Considering the growing number of the newly poor and hungry, considering also the situation of our sick or refugee fellow humans, Ivan will not be at a loss for work, he will not be unemployed. At the close of our lives, whether we be fathers or mothers, deacons, priests, bishops, or popes, we shall all be judged on the love we will have shown or not to our needy sisters and brothers.

A BOLD PROGRAMME

Several organisations in our country have gotten together recently to draw up a "common" programme to eradicate poverty in our midst. Here are the ten steps they have come up with: promote a viable development, promote human rights, establish a more equitable universal economic order, develop a spirit of fairness among people, improve the living conditions of children, promote peace, promote food security, promote the social responsibility of individuals and societies, reinvest in our aid programme to foreign countries, and promote public participation. This is quite a programme. The document also adds: "We have the means to eliminating poverty; redistribution of only 1% of the world revenue would be enough to put an end to absolute poverty."

COMPATIBILITY WITH THE DIACONATE

Is such a plan compatible with the life and ministry of a deacon? We have only to look at the mission of the Church's first seven deacons and of those who have followed, to say with Saint Lawrence that "the wealth of the Church is the poor." We can thus go back in history, but closer to us we find in Pope John Paul II a leader able to incite us to turn resolutely to the poor: a preferential option for the poor has become a way of imitating

Jesus. Consecrated by the imposition of hands transmitted from the Apostles, the deacon carries out his ministry of charity in such a way that one can see in him a disciple of the one who came not to be served but to serve. It is all together that we can contribute in giving life, and life in abundance, to all our brothers and sisters.

WORD AND EUCHARIST

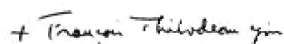
The deacon's joy is also found in proclaiming the Word of God, in serving at Eucharist, and in praying. Having received the strengthening gift of the Holy Spirit, the deacon helps the bishop and his presbyterium in the ministry of Word and altar, by being the servant of all. Instituted minister of the altar, he proclaims the Gospel and prepares the eucharistic sacrifice. He harmonises his entire life with that of Christ whose body and blood he takes from the altar to distribute to the faithful. By the mission received from the bishop, it is also his duty to exhort unbelievers as well as believers, to instruct them in the faith, to preside at prayer, to celebrate baptisms, to assist at weddings and bless them in the name of the Church, to take viaticum to the dying and preside at funerals. The deacon celebrates the liturgy of the hours in union with the people of God, praying for them and for the world.

CELIBACY AND COMMUNION

Deacon Ivan will exercise his ministry in celibacy: he is both a sign and a challenge to pastoral charity and a source of fruitfulness in the world. Prompted by sincere charity for Christ the Lord, and living in this state in perfect devotedness, he shall dedicate himself to Christ more single-mindedly, give himself more totally to the service of God and of his brothers and sisters, and be more available to work at the Kingdom task.

Finally, I want to point out that every ministry in the Church, notably the diaconal ministry, must be exercised in true and deep communion with the bishop, in respect and obedience. Despite his personal failings and weaknesses, the bishop is successor of the Apostles who were sent by Jesus throughout the world to proclaim the Gospel to all nations, to sanctify them, and to serve them. It is our Lord Jesus Christ himself, the High Priest for all eternity, who is present among his people in the person of the bishop surrounded by his priests. When today we stress Church-as-communion, it is important to always be in communion with one another so that together we be a sign of the Body of Christ.

May this ordination to the diaconate contribute to the glory of God and the salvation of the world!



+ François Thibodeau
Bishop of Edmundston

« From A Bishop's Journal » (305) (17 November 1999)