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## YOU SHALL BE A HAPPY PRIEST!

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On May 20 I had the joy of ordaining Ivan Thériault to the priesthood, in the Saint-Georges parish church. Following the scripture readings of the occasion my desire was to further ponder the mystery of the divine calling, of the mission given, of how it is lived day to day. It is truly one of the most beautiful gifts God could give us in this jubilee year, to welcome a new priest into our Church! And what a beautiful gift also to Saint-Georges parish which is celebrating its golden anniversary!

### A SHORT PRAYER

*"Grant that Ivan work faithfully at building up the Body of Christ":* this was the gist of my first prayer after having chosen him for the order of priests.

### A CALL TO WELCOME

It is not easy to welcome a call from God. God's call to the young Samuel had to be repeated three times before the future prophet answered, and it was the old priest Eli who helped Samuel discern the call. At first glance, in acknowledging the scarcity of priestly ordinations, we could easily compare our times to those of the prophet Samuel: *"The word of the Lord was rare in those days; the visions were not widespread"* (1 Sam. 3:1). I do not believe this to be our situation. I would even go as far as to affirm that the Lord has never called as often as in our times. Listen to all the thousands of challenges made to both young and old, in the name of the Lord, at all levels of the Church. There is something mysterious here relating to the clarity of the message and the freedom of each one challenged. There can be so much noise interfering with the voice of the Lord that we hardly hear and discern it. Samuels are needed more than ever before, but we also need Elis to mentor them and help them discover the voice of the Lord calling in their own night.

### A GOSPEL TO PROCLAIM

The Lord calls one to a marvellous, demanding mission which requires the total gift of oneself not only on the day of ordination but on a daily basis; and this mission is the proclamation of the Gospel.

### A PROPHET OF HOPE

The most stimulating mission there is is that of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus. There is good news to experience and proclaim: daily proclaiming Jesus' message of love and peace, daily proclaiming the mystery of God, the marvel of the Incarnation, the marvel of the Resurrection of Jesus; proclaiming with one's whole being and especially through personal witness the word and acts of Jesus; proclaiming the presence of the Spirit in the midst of the world. Through the Holy Spirit, becoming and being in our times witnesses full of hope, becoming for our times a living Gospel, this is an exciting, ennobling mission which fulfils a human being's deepest yearnings.

## IN SERVICE TO OTHERS

Jesus, who was designated the Gospel of the Father by Pope Paul VI in his unforgettable exhortation on evangelisation, lived thoroughly the Gospel he came to proclaim, lowering himself even to washing his disciples' feet, just as a slave would his master's. This was the example he gave us. In order to live like Jesus the mission given to us, we must first look at how the people around us live and daily experience the services they render: consider the mother, the father who day after day give themselves to work, the sales clerk or waitress who are always on the go, attentive to their customers' least desires; look at the nursing staff surrounding the patient. To live one's priestly mission like Jesus is truly a continuous, constant service. Working from nine to five is demanding, tiring, exhausting: a priestly ministry in the footsteps of Jesus requires even more; it is not limited by office hours.

## FULL TIME!

Being a priest is full time work! Becoming the bishop's collaborator as a priest, tirelessly serving and guiding the people of God through the direction of the Holy Spirit is an immense service. It is a grand service to carry out wisely and with dignity the ministry of the Word by proclaiming the Gospel and explaining the Catholic faith. It is a great service to celebrate with faith the mysteries of Christ, especially the Eucharistic sacrifice and the sacrament of reconciliation according to Church tradition, for the praise of God and the sanctification of the Christian people. This, too, is a great service: to implore the mercy of God for one's people through constancy in prayer, to join oneself daily to Jesus the High Priest and with him to dedicate oneself to God for the salvation of humankind. A humble, daily, often hidden service. Living in communion with one's bishop, in respect and obedience, that too is a service. It is truly to form a team with the Church, a team of life experience with one's brothers and sisters mandated for a common mission. Without this daily, regular communion, the priest would be unable to carry out his other services in holiness.

## A DIVINE TASK

The breadth of the priestly ministry could appear unbelievable, even frightening. It is not a human task, one which can be measured and carried out automatically. It is a divine task. The mission entrusted to the priest at his ordination carries with it the gift of the Holy Spirit which will never fail him. Ivan, go forward in confidence; do not fear, open up fully to the grace of God. The more you are faithful to your mission in the beloved Church of Edmundston, the more you work faithfully at building up the Body of Christ, the more you will be a happy priest. Amen.

*+ François Thibodeau*

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Bishop of Edmundston

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