
A PRIEST'S WORKDAY



As we near the World Day of Prayer for Vocations, I would like to share the following reflection with you. The last meeting of the Edmundston seminarians with the formation team and the mentors was held on the themes, *What does the priest do throughout the day?* and *What special training must future priests be given?* Priests, future priests and lay people reflected on the many tasks a priest must take on, in his ministry, so as to better discern those which are the most important. The following is the outcome of meeting reflection.

THERE IS NO LONGER A TYPICAL WORKDAY

If in the not-too-distant past it was possible to draw up the typical timetable of a parish priest in the city or in the country, changes which have taken place in parishes no longer allow us to draw a "model" schedule for priests: rise early, physical exercise, meditation, Mass, breakfast, divine office, visits to the sick, etc. The number, age and health of priests are partial reasons for this, as each priest tries to dispose as best he can of the twenty-four hours of his day. Then there are the Vatican II reforms affecting our parishes, and in spite of the thirty-five years now separating us from the Council, there are those who claim that we are only at our first discoveries and first implementation of the Council reforms! According to certain wise men, it takes more than a century to apply a council's pastoral vision!

HESITATIONS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

« In today's world, with the many tasks which people have to do and the great variety of problems facing them and very often needing to be solved very quickly, there is often danger of those whose energies are divided among different activities. Priests who are perplexed and distracted by the multiplicity of tasks facing them may be very concerned about how they can unify their interior life and their program of external activity. This cannot be achieved merely by an outward arrangement of ministerial tasks nor by the practice of spiritual exercises alone, though this may help to foster such unity. Priests can bring unity into their lives by following the example of Christ the Lord as they carry out their ministry: his food was to do the will of him who sent him to accomplish his work. » [Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 14] These words of Vatican Council II are as timely today as they were back in 1965.

THREE KEY MINISTRIES

Unless we refer to the three key ministries given to priests by the Church, it is not possible to find one's way through the maze of tasks which command the priest's full attention today, whether at the parish, hospital, school, or diocesan levels. The priest is given three major ministries: as the bishop's collaborator, the priest is minister of the Word and the sacraments, and pastor of God's people. If there are any guidebooks detailing the exercise of these various ministries, daily life often calls upon the priest in a special way: to the youth he meets on the street, the workers he meets at the mill, the elderly he visits in the nursing home, the priest must be able to speak a word of faith, of friendship, of hope, on behalf of Jesus Christ. This manner of communicating God's Word can seem very different from the more official proclamation within the assembly, but it is always the same word of life, God's own Word. The celebration of a sacrament, whatever it is, requires time, reflection and sharing, according to each one's faith experiences. And it is difficult

to dissociate sacramental preparation: the two stages are mutual, if one wants a fruitful follow-up for the individual and the community.... The mission of pastor is exercised in many areas, but above all in his many personal encounters and the many meetings he attends, which help him foster unity and the harmony in the community; the pastor "gathers" the people in Jesus' name and ensures the ongoing Christian formation of the community's future leaders.

STIMULATING TASKS

At the heart of our diocesan Church, following the 1987-1990 Synod recommendations and diocesan directives of the past ten years, three major "ministries" have constantly been put of the fore. The priest has been more and more freed from all administrative tasks so as to pursue the main priority of evangelisation which consists in proclaiming and celebrating God's Word. This was a very difficult change all around, what with the different expectations from the faithful and the various ways of doing things, before. The formation of various committees and sub-committees required a lot of energy: finding people, motivating them, supporting them, and mentoring them is still not an easy task. There is the constant work of information and formation. If the "sermon" was usually preached on Sundays and feast days only, on the other hand the "homily" is required in all circumstances: a gesture of faith and Word of life... Every baptism, every wedding, every funeral, every liturgy of forgiveness is accompanied by a Word which actualizes the actions and teaching of Jesus. This not only assumes a time for adequate preparation, but also an intense prayer life, and times of spiritual renewal during the day and often in the course of the year. It is no longer just anything that a priest can say, but the word that Jesus wants him to pronounce at a given time to raise hope and love. As man of God and man of prayer, the priest is challenged to live the same solidarity which Jesus lived with humankind while he was on earth: to be available to the sick, the children, the marginalised, and to be as close to God the Father as on the day of the Tabor and of the Passion.

SOMEONE WE DON'T KNOW

The religious composer Didier Rimaud wrote this about Jesus: "Listen, my friends, there is among us someone we don't know." I believe that we could also say this of the priest, at least because we don't know him enough... It is in faith that we can recognize in this man whom Jesus has chosen and consecrated, a messenger of God to proclaim good news, to bring people together and with Him, and to contribute in helping them grow in faith, hope and charity. That this man of God make us grow in hope, this is my daily prayer! And the fact that he dedicates the major part of his day to this challenge, heartens to the utmost!

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