
THE BISHOP'S FAITHFUL COLLABORATORS



On March 25 I addressed my third pastoral to the priests and seminarians of the Diocese of Edmundston. The letter is entitled *The Bishop's Faithful Collaborators*, borrowing the very words that are used in the priestly ordination rite. The letter's object was to share with them regarding the important ecclesial mission in which we are involved together on a daily basis. And I engaged in this sharing all the more readily now that the priests' senate has started to seriously reflect on the mission of the priest in a Church and a society in profound change; and the senate members want to pursue this reflection further with the priests at the clergy annual meeting, on May 29. today I humbly offer you a few excerpts from these elements of personal reflection. I am doing so with these words of the apostle Peter in mind (2 Peter 1:10): « Be solicitous to make your call and election permanent, brothers; surely those who do so will never be lost. »

WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT?

A few weeks ago I sent to the priests a document entitled *Prêtres: vivre plutôt que survivre*, by German authors Wilhelm Breuning and Klaus Hemmerle. In the foreword the authors state that the bishops' first concern must be for their priests. In wanting to highlight an unusual point, the authors go so far as to say that the bishop is bishop first of all for his priests and that he cannot be such except by being a priest along with his priests. While affirming that I was ordained bishop for the entire Church and appointed to the beloved Church of Edmundston, I am drawn to the ten priorities of the above authors, and I would like them to be studied by all the priests of the Edmundston diocese. « My way of living as a priest is more important than everything I do as a priest. What Christ accomplishes in me is more important than what I myself accomplish. To live unity within the presbyterium is more important than to allow myself to get caught up, alone, in my work. Service of prayer and the Word is more important than table service. Being a spiritual mentor to the collaborators is more important than getting the most work done by oneself and alone. To be fully present and to spread out in a few areas is more important than wanting to be everywhere, but hastily and in half-measure. To act in unity is more important than acting alone in isolation, however perfect this acting may be; collaboration is therefore more important than action. Because it is more fruitful, the cross is more important than efficiency. An over-all openness (on the community, the diocese, the universal Church) is more important than attention paid to special interests, however justified they may be. Witnessing to the faith before all is more important than satisfying all usual requests. »

A SPIRIT « THAT MAKES US STRONG, LOVING, AND WISE »

How can one remain serene and hopeful in the midst of all these daily choices, comments, and even criticisms? When I read the second letter of Saint Paul to Timothy, the exhortation of this passionate man of God resonates in a very singular way throughout my being: « For this reason I remind you to stir into a flame the gift of God bestowed when my hands were laid on you. The Spirit God has given us is no cowardly spirit, but rather one that makes us strong, loving, and wise. Therefore, never be ashamed of your testimony to our Lord, nor of me, a prisoner for his sake; but with the strength which comes from God bear your share of the hardship which the gospel entails. God has saved us and called us to a holy life, not because of any merit of ours but according to his own design - the grace held out to us in Christ Jesus before the world began. » How can we not remember that God is the source of all life and growth? He is the one who gives His people life and growth; He it is who raises up among His people the different ministries He needs. Much thanksgiving must be given to Him for the many vocations He has raised up among us.

THE BLESSED DAY OF OUR ORDINATION

As I refer the priests to the day of their own ordination to the priesthood I cannot help but remember what I myself became, on May 8, 1965. How can I forget Bishop Joseph-Aurèle Plourde's exhortation calling me to pray, to proclaim the Word of God, to celebrate the mysteries of Christ in a holy manner, to remain united to Jesus the Sovereign Priest, and to live in deep communion with the Church? How can I not stir up in myself this gift of God, as I read the prayer proper to ordination, recited by the bishop: « Today, Lord, grant us the fellow-workers we need to exercise the apostolic priesthood. Almighty Father, grant to this servant of yours the dignity of the priesthood. Renew within him the Spirit of holiness. As a co-worker with the order of bishops, may he be faithful to the ministry that he receives from you, Lord God, and be to others a model of right conduct. May he be a faithful collaborator with the order of bishops, so that the words of the Gospel may reach the ends of the earth, and the family of nations, made one in Christ, may become God's one, holy people. »

A DEEP SPIRITUAL LIFE

Barely ten years ago, on September 11, 1984, when he met with the priests in Montreal, Pope John Paul II declared: « It is through your ministry carried out with conviction and focused on the Eucharist that your spirituality develops, which you must also nourish by personal mental prayer. Servants of God's Word, let yourselves be challenged, remade, and comforted by this Word. Gatherers of the community and responsible for unity, marvel at the works which God is carrying out among your people. Ministers of the sacraments, let yourselves be converted by what you celebrate. »

Beloved brothers and sisters, this is a very stimulating programme, whatever our age, whatever our state of health, whatever our particular ministry. It would be beneficial for these short sentences to be picked up and lovingly meditated, by priest teams.

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