
BE A SHEPHERD AFTER THE HEART OF JESUS



On June 23 I had the joy of ordaining Ghislain Rémillard to the priesthood. The grace of being granted a new priest is a great event for our entire Church. It is both a gift and a mystery, as Pope John Paul II reminds us. And so, in a spirit of fellowship, I want to share with you the eminent commitments linked to ordination.

SALT OF THE EARTH AND LIGHT OF THE WORLD

In the letter officially calling him to priestly ordination, I wrote to Ghislain: *« As man of God and man of prayer, man of peace and of communion, you will be called to live the great challenges of the next millennium. As your bishop's faithful collaborator you shall bring him joy and you shall live this demanding ministry in peace and tranquillity. »* By establishing your life along these guidelines, Ghislain, you will truly be salt of the earth and light of the world, as the readings chosen for this ordination make clear. In a few moments I shall question you further regarding your deep motives, and you will see in this examination the many ways of being salt of the earth and light of the world.

THE PRIEST'S MISSION

An the last 35 years numerous changes have taken place in society, in the Church and in the life of priests, but it is still the same mission that is continuing, however many changes there may be. Ghislain, the first question I shall ask on behalf of the Church is the following: *« Are you resolved, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to discharge without fail the office of priesthood in the presbyteral order as a conscientious fellow worker with the bishops in caring for the Lord's flock? »* It is in total freedom that you respond to the Lord's call, and this is the freedom required and which you surrender in service to Christ and to your bishop. *« Fidelity and collaboration with your bishop throughout your priestly life. »* Fidelity in whatever mission is entrusted to you, ongoing, constant, and close collaboration with your bishop, otherwise what meaning would there be for your priesthood? Ghislain, you will find within the Edmundston presbyterium faithful and generous fellow priests. You will learn as I have to admire their fidelity and devotedness. For three years now that I have been at the service of this beloved Church of Edmundston, I can assert that I have been filled with admiration for this constant fidelity and collaboration. The four series of appointments I have made since 1994 are a attest to this essential collaboration. Ghislain, you are a priest not for yourself but in order to serve: a never-ending service, a demanding service, a service modelled on that of Jesus; you become a priest in order to serve and guide the people of God under the guidance of the Holy Spirit; a service that will take on the most varied shape as years go by, according to the spiritual and pastoral needs of the people as well as according to your own availability and state of health.

MINISTRY OF THE WORD

The second question, too, is demanding: *« Are you resolved to exercise the ministry of the word worthily and wisely, preaching the Gospel and explaining the Catholic faith? »* As the bishop's faithful collaborator you are associated with his primary ministry of proclaiming the Word of God. Not only must you proclaim the Gospel but you yourself must be a living gospel: your whole life must be harmonise with the Word of God. May the Gospel be Good News for you, and may it also be such for those who will hear your proclamation. In our more and more secularised society it is not always an easy task to proclaim the Word. If there are some who no longer want to hear anything about the Gospel or the Church, there are still many others who hunger and thirst for the Word of God.

MYSTERY AND MERCY

A third question sets us in the very heart of our faith: « *Are you resolved to celebrate the mysteries of Christ faithfully and religiously as the Church has handed them down to us for the glory of God and the sanctification of Christ's people?* » Here we have material for an entire life programme for both the ordained and the people of God, since the renewed Vatican Council II liturgy induces us to become fully aware participants in the celebration of the life of faith. The fourth question has to do with mercy and prayer: « *Are you resolved to implore with us the mercy of God for the people to be confided to your care, by being always diligent in prayer?* » Word of God, Eucharist, Reconciliation, Prayer: These are commitments that will not leave you workless. As a man of God, the priest must set himself within a prayerful environment, with time for prayer; and he must persist in prayer. Close by the cathedral at Edmundston, a group of young people follow a daily three-and-a-half-hour prayer schedule. The priest who desires to be a man of prayer must aim not only at a few minutes of prayer, he must also watch over the quality of his relationship with God. And here is a fifty commitment: « *Are you resolved to consecrate your life to God for the salvation of his people, and to unite yourself more closely every day to Christ the High Priest, who offered himself for us to the Father as a perfect sacrifice?* » The priest's life and ministry are inseparable from the life and ministry of Jesus. "Have in you the same feelings that were in Christ Jesus. I live now, but it is not I but Christ who lives in me." A mystery of deepest intimacy and unity with Christ Jesus.

LIVING IN COMMUNION

A sixth and final question which more or less sets the five previous ones in context: « *Do you promise respect and obedience to me and my successors?* » This is much more than a mere token of obedience: "Is it your will to live in communion with me?" A life of communion, a life of solidarity, a life dedicated to a common mission, whatever one's age, state of health, or charge given. It might be demanding to live in communion with one's bishop, to never speak ill of one's bishop or fellow priests, since priests and bishop form but one presbyterium. To never sully another's reputation. A priest who would slander his bishop or his confreres and even the Church would thereby destroy the unity that was willed by the Lord and for which he prayed at his last supper. A priest who slanders the Church would destroy his very self, since his vocation can be understood only within a vital relationship with his bishop, fellow priests, and the people confided to his care.

THE INDISPENSABLE AID OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Ghislain, all of these commitments could make you hesitate to come forward, and it would be a normal reaction. The charge is extremely all-encompassing. As the bishop's faithful collaborator, a priest's burden is as heavy, so to speak, as that of the bishop: With me and your brother priests you will carry the beloved Church of Edmundston. Fear, discouragement, fatigue could well be our lot, but the Lord gives you his Holy Spirit to help you carry out this marvellous mission. He gives you his Holy Spirit and he also gives you a presbyterium in the midst of which you will find extraordinary vigour. Do not cut yourself off from your confreres: it is together that we bear the same burden. You will find among your family and friends, as among the people you will be called to shepherd, strength that will allow you to go ever further, from day to day. In the Word you proclaim, in the sacraments you celebrate, in the community you gather will surge a power that will make you realise with amazement and thanksgiving the force of your new ministry. You parents who have been your support shall continue as such; the distance between Saint-Raphaël and Kedgwick will not be all that great!

May the prayer of this entire assembly and of the entire Church, may this ordination, this eucharist, be a light upon your feet for you to always be salt of the earth and light of the world for humankind!

+ François Thibodeau

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Bishop of Edmundston

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