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## OUR CHURCH NEEDS MANY HOLY PRIESTS

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On April 11, the Radio-Canada programme "Le Jour du Seigneur" telecast Sunday Mass from Saint-Thomas-d'Aquin Church in Lac Baker. My congratulations to the community there for their warm welcome and the witness of their faith. Today I would like to share with you excerpts from the homily I delivered at the celebration: may it be instrumental in raising up more priests, among us!

### "HERE I AM!"

Nearly ten years ago a nephew and a confrere of mine composed a song on the occasion of my episcopal ordination, a song entitled "Here I Am!" Today, Good Shepherd Sunday, I would like to meditate with you on Jesus the Good Shepherd, to meditate also in union with all those who have carried out the mission of Jesus and whose desire it is to do so today and continue doing so in the future. "Here I am, Lord, standing before you, divine Shepherd and my sweet Saviour!" The Letter to the Hebrews shows us Jesus coming into the world and saying to the Father: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you have prepared for me; holocausts and sin offering you took no delight in. Then I said, 'I have come to do your will, O God' (Hb. 10:5-7). In this way Jesus made known his total availability for carrying out his Father's will in all things, in absolute freedom. And he will repeatedly come back to this: "I have come to do your will." Even during his agony, Jesus prayed the Father: "May your will and not mine be done." Yes, let us contemplate Jesus the Good Shepherd, Jesus the Nazarean, the Father's Risen Jesus. It is thanks to him that all women and men are saved, liberated. All our projects are directed to him, and it is in him that we have abundant life, in him that we find happiness, a joy which no one can ever take from us, because there can be no salvation apart from him. Let us often contemplate Jesus: let us contemplate his love for the Father and for all humankind, let us contemplate his obedience, his poverty, his compassion for everyone, especially the poor, the rejected, the marginalised, and the suffering. Let us set our gaze on him: he knows us better than we know ourselves; he is the kind shepherd who leads us to springs of living water, he prepares a banquet for us. In his presence there is fullness of joy. With Jesus the Good Shepherd, let us confirm our availability for carrying out every day the will of the Father.

### SHEPHERDS YESTERDAY AND TODAY

As I contemplate Jesus the Good Shepherd, I also remember all those who, day after day, have dedicated themselves in service to their brothers and sisters. Through them I contemplate Jesus the servant, Jesus who shares this very day his pastoral mission of kindness, tenderness, love, compassion, and support. My memory is drawn especially to all the mothers whose Day it is, today, and to all the grandmothers and foster mothers; I also think of all the fathers, all the parents, all the teachers and educators, all those who in some way or other have personified Jesus the Good Shepherd in our homes, schools, and parishes. My special thoughts are also with all the priests of yesterday and today, all the religious brothers and sisters who responded so generously to the Lord's call. I am thinking of the pastors who have ministered here in Lac Baker, these past one hundred years. I am thinking of all the priests of our respective Churches, especially those of the Diocese of Edmundston who last year shared with us their vocation stories. They discovered their calling from the Lord in prayer and with support from their families and parish communities, they responded generously. Through them the mission of Jesus the Good Shepherd reaches out to our brothers and sisters.

## OUR WORLD NEEDS GOOD SHEPHERDS

May these days of prayer raise in us the desire to model our lives on Jesus, the Good Shepherd. May they help us become more and more like him who continues to give his life for the world. Our world craves his presence: may he guide our steps into the way of life, may he lead us once again to the springs of living water, may he quench our thirst for him. May our hearts truly long for the Good Shepherd, and may our footsteps always turn to him! May we listen to his voice in the needs of our brothers and sisters who call to us, and may we have a good shepherd's heart to answer the needs of our time! May Jesus reassure us in the challenges we face. The Good Shepherd will walk with each and every one of us. In the storm-tossed tempests of life, he shall be the solid rock to protect us; we shall be able to continue without fear, his open heart shall be our comfort always. Ready to go even further, we shall journey behind Jesus, behind our ancestors and forebears, following our parents, bearers of the Good News. With ever more assurance we shall walk in joy and gladness. Yes, the love which the Father has showered on us in His Son the Good Shepherd is truly great and wonderful. It is the Father's will that we be the beloved children of God. Let us courageously and resolutely proclaim to the world the good news of God's love. We have been chosen from all eternity to be God's children: let us respond generously to His love, in our married life, our religious life, our ordained ministry. "Love for love," as the priest-poet Robert Lebel sings, "to the very gift of oneself. Is there a more beautiful token of love than to give oneself without reserve? Love for love! Affection for affection... the gift of self to the point of dying for Love!"

## OFFERING AND PRAYER

May the words of Father Patrice Vallée kindle in us a desire to be shepherds as Jesus was!

I offer you my heart: Receive it, Lord, it is yours!

I offer you my heart: Keep it in your heart, O Lord.

You have called me to proclaim your name: Be my voice, Lord, it is yours!

To gather all the friends, may I be you in human flesh.

You have picked me to carry you: Take my hands, Lord, they are yours!

To feed the starving for lack of love, may I be you in human flesh.

You have chosen me to serve you: Take my life, Lord, it is yours!

To protect the weak and the poor, may I be you in human flesh.

You have chosen me to forgive: Take my arms, Lord, they are yours!

To come to the aid of those who pray, may I be you in human flesh.

Have a good week!

*+ François Thibodeau*

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