



## North Thompson Catholic Parishes

### Roman Catholic Diocese of Kamloops

Congregation for the Clergy

Priesthood

a greater love

International Symposium on the Thirtieth Anniversary of the

Promulgation of the Conciliar Decree

*Presbyterorum Ordinis*

### **Who is the priest? What is the priesthood?**

The priesthood is a *vocation*. No one can claim this dignity himself, but only those who are called by God. The author of the *Letter to the Hebrews* puts it very clearly when he affirms that *the divine vocation to the priesthood* does not only concern priests of the Old Testament, but first and foremost *Christ himself* the Son who is consubstantial with the Father, made a priest according to the order of Melchizedek, the one priest "forever" of the new and eternal Covenant. In the Son's vocation to the priesthood *a dimension of the Trinitarian mystery* is expressed.

At the same time, Christ's priesthood is a *consequence of the Incarnation*. Born of Mary, the eternal, only-begotten Son of God enters into the order of creation. He becomes a priest, *the one* priest, and this is why those who possess the sacramental priesthood in the Church of the New Covenant participate in his unique priesthood.

*The priesthood is a gift.* The Bible states: "One does not take upon himself, but he is called by God" (Hebrews 5:4).  
*The priesthood is the nerve center of the Church's whole life and mission.*

*The priesthood is a mystery,* which is greater than man. Before such a reality it is necessary to repeat with St. Paul: "how unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!" (cf. Romans 11:33).

On 1 November next I will be entering *my 50th year as a priest*. Thinking about the story of my vocation, I must confide that it was an "adult" vocation, although in a certain sense it was foreseeable in the period of my adolescence. After my matriculation at Wadowice Secondary School in 1938, I began to read Polish philology, at the Jagiellonian University, Krakow; this corresponded to my interests and leanings at the time, but these studies were interrupted by the Second World War, in September 1939. In September 1940 I started work, first in a stone quarry and then in the Solvay factory. *My priestly vocation matured in me precisely in that difficult situation*. It matured amidst my country's suffering; it matured in physical work among the workmen; it also matured thanks to the spiritual direction of various priests, especially that of my confessor. In October 1942 I presented myself at Krakow's major seminary and was admitted. From that time, although I continued working as a factory-hand in Solvay factory, I became a clandestine student of the Faculty of Theology at the Jagiellonian University and numbered among the students of the major seminary in Krakow. *I was ordained a priest on 1 November 1946* by Cardinal Adam Stefan Sapieha, in his private chapel.

*The priest is a man of the Eucharist.* In the span of nearly 50 years of priesthood, what is still the most important and most sacred moment for me is the celebration of the Eucharist. My awareness of celebrating *in persona Christi* at the altar prevails. Never in the course of these years have I failed to celebrate the Most Holy Sacrifice. If this has occurred, it has been due entirely to reasons independent of my will. *Holy Mass is the absolute center of my life and of every day of my life.* It is at the heart of the theology of the priesthood, a theology I learned not so much from text books as from living examples of holy priests. First and foremost, from the holy Cure of Ars, Jean Marie Vianney. Still today I remember his biography written by Fr. Trochu, which literally overwhelmed me. I mention the Cure of Ars but he is not the only model of the priesthood who impressed me. There were other holy priests who I admired, having known them either through their hagiographies, or personally, because they were contemporaries. I looked to them and from them I learned what the priesthood is, both as a vocation and as a ministry.

*The priest is a man of prayer.* "I nourish you with what I myself live on," St. Anselm said. The proclaimed truths must be discovered and adopted in the intimacy of prayer and meditation. Our ministry of the word consists in expressing what was first prepared in prayer.

However, this is not the only dimension of priestly prayer. Since the priest is mediator between God and men, many turn to him asking for prayers. *Thus prayer, in a certain sense, "creates" the priest, especially as Pastor.* And at the same time every priest "creates himself" constantly, through prayer. I am thinking of the marvelous prayer of the Breviary, *Officium Divinum*, in which the whole Church, through the lips of her ministers, prays together with Christ; I am thinking of the vast numbers of requests and prayer intentions that are constantly presented to me by various people. I take note of the intentions mentioned to us by people from all over the world and I keep them in my chapel on my *prie-dieu*, so that they are constantly in my mind, even when they cannot literally be repeated every day. There they stay and it can be said that the Lord Jesus knows them, for they are among the notes on my *prie-dieu* and also in my heart.

Being priests today. *The theme of priestly identity* is always timely, because it is a question of our "being ourselves." During the Second Vatican Council and immediately afterwards, much was said about this. The problem probably originated in a certain pastoral crisis, in the face of secularization and the abandonment of religious practices. Priests began to wonder: *are we still necessary?* And many priests displayed symptoms of a certain loss of their own identity.

From the start, as the author of the *Letter to the Hebrews* wrote, the priest was "*taken from among men and made their representative before God to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins*" (cf. Hebrews 5:1). This is the best definition of the priest's identity. Every priest, according to the gifts bestowed upon him by the Creator, can serve God in various ways and with his priestly ministry, can reach various sectors of human life, bringing them closer to God. However, he remains and must remain a man chosen among others and "*made their representative before God.*"

Priestly identity implies fidelity to Christ and to the People of God to whom we are sent. It is not only something intimate which concerns the priest's self-awareness. It is *reality that is constantly examined and verified by men*, because the priest is "*taken from among men and made their representative before God to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.*"

But how can a priest totally fulfil his vocation? You know the secret well, dear priests: it is *by trusting in God's support and constantly striving for holiness*. This evening I would like to wish each of you "the grace to rekindle daily the gift of God you have received with the laying on of hands (cf Timothy 1:6), to feel the comfort of the deep friendship which binds you to Jesus and unites you with one another, the comfort of experiencing the joy of seeing the flock of God grow in an ever greater love for him and for all people, of cultivating the tranquil conviction that the One who began in you the good work will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ (cf Philippians 1:6)" (*Pastores Dabo vobis*, n. 82).

May Mary *most holy Mother of priests*, sustain you with her *example and intercession*.