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Today is a happy and blessed day for St. Francis Parish. Eleven years ago, a young man from this parish went down to Notre Dame with a vision in his heart. It was hard for him to leave family, friends and all the familiar haunts of his boyhood behind. It was just as difficult by anticipation to face eleven years of rigid discipline, and a seemingly endless course of studies in the classics and sciences, in Philosophy and Theology. He knew that if he wanted to achieve his Vision, it must be so, for a priest must be trained in mind and heart. While it was like jumping at an early age into the great unknown, and though the very thought of it perplexed him, he made his decision and set his heart on the goal ahead. With all the difficulties there was one great consolation — The Vision of what he sought loomed ahead, even though far ahead. And all the while it was coming closer. He knew that if he strove for that Vision manfully, and faithfully, he would be coming home again to his family and friends. That blessed day of home-coming would be a day of triumph for him and for his parents and family and friends, a great day of joy for all this parish, for the whole Kingdom of God, for he who left this parish as just another boy would be coming home a consecrated priest of The Most High God.

And so, the eleven years have passed since John VanMoulear left this parish. Many things have happened during those years. It would be difficult to assess the things that have happened in the soul of the young priest who comes back home to you today. There were endless days of prayer and study — days that began at five in the morning and lasted into the night. Days when The Vision seemed all too far ahead to be ever attained, nights when the litter of difficulties and trials seemed as black as darkness outside the Chapel windows. And when there seemed no end to the long road ahead, only one thing kept him going — The same Vision that had started him on the way, the same Vision that comes home with him today.

No one but God will ever know all that transpired in his soul during those years of trial and preparation, as one year slowly followed another, and the Vision so far off at first, gradually grew nearer, and brighter and clearer. No one but a fellow priest will really know what it meant to kneel before the Bishop in Sacred Heart Church last Wednesday, to feel the hands of that successor of the Apostles on his head, to have his own hands anointed with consecrated oil, to touch the chalice and host of Sacrifice, to be clad with the sacred Vestments of the Mass, to hear the words that engraved upon his soul the eternal and indelible mark of Christ the Priest.

Yes, eleven long years have passed, and now at the thought of what has finally happened to him, those years blend into nothing but the realization of all his hopes and prayers. The boy who left this parish with a Vision has come back to share the triumph of that Vision with all of you. And because he is now a priest, not so much for himself as for you, it is only fitting that while you share his joy this morning, you might also share the Vision of Vision that carried him through those eleven long years, the Vision of what he is today.

You could search far and wide in this world without finding a Vision quite so noble or quite so ennobling as that of Christ's Priesthood. And the reason is that this Vision is the Very Vision of Christ Himself. The Priest is a priest because he is consecrated and committed to be what Christ is, to do what Christ did. The Priest, more than anything else, is another Christ.

Christ, Our Lord, as you know, came into a world that was separated from God and buried in the worse kind of ignorance and sin. What the world needed more than anything else was someone who could lift the barrier of sin and span the ever-widening gap between God and men. Christ was the perfect go-between, since He was both Perfect God and Perfect Man. A perfect union of God and man that was accomplished in His Very Person. He came thus prepared, to bring all other men back to God. This was his priestly mission: to bring God to men and men to God.

You recall how He was greeted at the beginning of His Public Life - behold the Lamb of God, behold Him who taketh away the sins of the world. But not only did He come to remove a barrier. He was also to set up a new pattern of living, a new way of Life. " I have come that you may have Life and have it more abundantly. " " I am the Way, the Truth and the Life." This was the fullness of the gift of Christ, the new and perfect Priest: a way of life to those who had been stumbling about in the darkness of this world of unbelief; the truth of Faith to those who were buried in the darkness of error; a new Life to those who had long been dead in sins. You know from the Gospel how His three short years of work were committed to this task, how he spent long hours with the rich and poor, the lawyers, bankers, farmers, workers, fishermen and housewives - bringing them closer to God and bringing God closer to them.

You can understand how eventually He gave His own life that all of us might live, and how this priestly offering was consummated on Calvary.

All this was not to end with the death of Christ - for there were still millions of souls to be saved, and centuries yet to feel the need of His way and Truth and Life. So He said to a handful of men: "Receive Ye the Holy Spirit. As the Father has sent me, I send you. Go Teach all Nations, commanding them to observe all the things I have taught you, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of The Son and of The Holy Spirit. Who hears you, hears me. Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them." And because Christ gave those first priests the fullness of his priestly mission and powers, He even gave them power over Himself, that He might be with His priests and people all days to strengthen, guide, comfort and save them. That is why the central part of our celebration here this morning is not my words, or the reception that follows, but the sacred act by which Father Van Wolvlear exercises his newly given priestly power to speak in the name of Christ and to renew the priestly Mystery Christ's eternal sacrifice on Calvary, to bring God again into our midst as our Saviour and Lord. No wonder that we bow our heads at His words of consecration - for here is a power that not even the Blessed Virgin Mary nor the Angels have. Here is the priestly power of Christ vested in one of your own young men. Here is the fulfillment of the words of Holy Scripture, "A priest is taken from among men and consecrated to the things that pertain to God". Here is the Vision of God's priesthood that has ever inspired young men to walk in the footsteps of Christ and to respond gladly to his call: "Come, Follow Me."

What other words can fill the heart of our new priest today, than the joyful words that Our Blessed Mother uttered at the thought of bringing Christ into a world that so badly needs him: "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and My spirit has rejoiced in God My saviour.....for He that is mighty has done great things to me and holy is His name."

The Vision that has come to fruition is not ending today but rather beginning. Henceforth Father Van Wovlear can spend himself as Christ spent himself to bring the blessings of God to men and the strivings of men to God. Henceforth, this is His life: To be close to God and close to God's people, to be their means of coming close to God, to be a Christlike go-between as he sacrifices and teaches at the altar, as he forgives their sins in the Confessional, as he consoles and guides and saves through life and at the hour of death, to give and give and give with all the priestly powers he has received from Christ, until the shadows lengthen, and his own day is done and the time comes to go home to the Great High Priest with his hands full of the souls he has saved in Christ's name along the high ways and by ways of this world. Then he too will truly understand what a tremendous grace it is to be a priest of God. Then also we will realize what a great cause we have had for rejoicing today, as he begins his priestly ministrations.

It would not be right to close these words without a word of sincere congratulations to Father Van Wovlear's own Father and Mother. Under God, it is they who are responsible for this day. There would be no priests at all if there were not first of all, Christian Marriages, and Christian parents and Christian homes to be the well-spring of life from which God selects his priests-to-be.

The first and greatest blessings that flow from the hands of our new priest will undoubtedly be upon his parents and family and all others that have helped to make this day possible. To all of you good people and fellow parishoners, we wish the fullness of the grace that Father Van Wovlear invokes upon you this day: " May the blessings of Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit descend upon you and remain forever."