



★ SALESIAN SPIRIT – ST. CAFASSO'S CONFERENCES
Fr. Pathiaraj Rayappan SDB

CAFASSO ON PRAYING

5. Efficacy of Priest's Prayers

If prayer, in general, is efficacious, how much more efficacious will be the prayer [of the priest] (1) which is done out of duty/office, (2) by a representative who is appointed to plead for that cause and (3) for the person whom he is representing?

- Have you ever considered the profound distinction between an ordinary citizen who appears before the king to ask for a favor and a delegate who is given authority & responsibility and, as such, is received into the king's presence to be heard with due respect? The delegate does not pray, but he represents his people! He does not ask but concurs! The king may do what he says! Such is the priest's condition on earth: as long as a simple believer prays, he is a believer who begs for mercy, but when the priest prays at the altar or on any occasion, he does so officially as the representative of the people, a role of immense honor and value.

- Imagine a mediator between two parties, as the priest is. On both sides, he does not limit himself to praying; instead, he proposes, advises, persuades, and goes on saying, 'this must be done', 'that must not be done', 'this way would be fine', 'that way would not be fine', '...so let's do it'!

- Observe how the king's minister speaks. He does not start praying. He describes the problem and the reasons and concludes: Your Majesty, you must do this!



It is a great weapon. It is nothing more than to speak to God about you and ask Him to deal with you.



That is the difference between the priest and the simple believers. Suppose the priest is imbued with this quality and adorned with this faith. In that case, he will begin to pray: “Lord, you know me, I am your minister, whom you have appointed as your representative on earth, to prevent sins, to save souls, to heal sinners, ... now I have come to speak to you about that scandal, that soul that does not care to know, that sinful chain which must be broken, that work for your greater glory which is not taking off because there are so many difficulties, ... I have done everything to win him over, to induce him, to prevent him, but it is useless, I am no longer enough, so I have come to you, ... I know that in a flash you can do it, I count on you!” This power in prayer, this ability to invoke change, is a tremendous responsibility and a source of inspiration for every priest.

Tell me, will the Lord send away empty-handed His minister, whom He Himself has appointed, for that very purpose and desires that it be achieved! The Lord’s refusal is unimaginable. [This case concerns another person. So, it may not succeed as it depends on him, too. But the priest would have done his duty! The fault will not be that of the priest or God!]

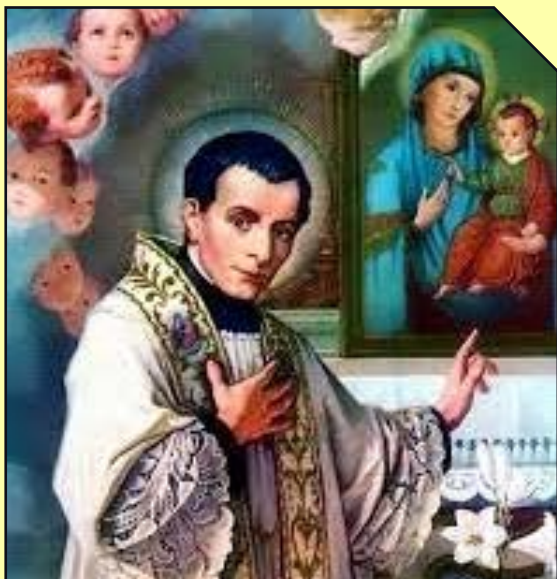
This is to make the priest realize how powerful his prayers are if he is a good priest.

6. Pray then like this!

Like Moses, insist with the Lord and don’t give up: “Lord it is useless that you send me away, or that you tell me that I do not merit it, or that your anger is just, or that ... Give me this grace or else I won’t leave you! Give me that soul, make that sinner come to his senses, make that penitent repent, let that scandal cease, stop that enmity, build up that family, ... or I stay here, and I do not depart!” This persistence in prayer, this unwavering commitment, is a key characteristic of a priest’s prayer life.

St. Bernard wrote to Pope Eugene on this point: “Holy Father, by the necessity of your office, you will have to come to conflict with certain monstrous men, not only evil but sold to iniquity, and who do not lack the power and the strength to support their defence. With the men of this sort, you will have to show yourself to be more than a man! When fighting evil, you have something far greater than a man can count on. Yes, far from withdrawing or covering your face in shame or fear, you must be bold and reveal yourself as the Vicar of God. But you will ask me how you should do it and who will give you the strength and courage. Nothing else than the spirit of prayer. It is said [Latin quotation]: Let him who despises admonition, fear prayer.”

The priest should reach that level of being equipped with



the spirit of prayer: When we have to deal with certain stubborn people with stony hearts who do not care to know, ... instead of shouting, railing at them and calling down lightning & punishments, ... let us take action with fire & with faith. It is as if we are telling them, “You don’t care about it, you don’t want to change yourself! Therefore, choose either to leave that sin or I will pray for you. I am taking the weapon of prayer in my hand, but know that you are forcing me to use that weapon of prayer. It is a great weapon. It is nothing more than to speak to God about you and ask Him to deal with you. You will see what a game I am playing and what I can achieve; I will hasten to convert you quickly; you don’t want to stop it; I will tell the Lord to stop it for you!”

A person could not give up a sinful relationship. After all attempts, the confessor finally thought that he could use this means of prayer. He told him,

“If you don’t want to resolve to give it up, at least allow me to pray for you. Are you happy?”

“Oh! Yes!” replied the other and thanked him.

“But know that I pray from the bottom of my heart, and when the confessor starts praying, it is a serious matter, and the Lord does not tell him ‘No’”

“Even better, because in that way, I’m sure that it will be granted”, the other replied.

“Alright then, be prepared for everything that God will decide.”

“But what are you asking for?” the other insisted, dismayed.

“Since you don’t want to hear about ending this life of sin, I plan to ask God to end it for you.”

“Ah, okay, but how will it end?”

“Well, it seems easy to understand what God will do. The Lord will take her, and so it will be over.”

“Ah! No! If it is like that, do not pray.”

“Here, there is no mid-way; either you change, or I pray.”

And he continuously begged the confessor to desist from this prayer!

All this may be for others, but when it comes to us, priests, we are on the safer side: prayer is unfailingly successful when it is pious and constant. A priest who presents himself before God and sincerely asks, “Lord, I am a priest, and as such, I need humility, mortification, detachment, purity, courage, confidence, ...” will have them granted. The prayer is even more efficacious when it is a question of ending a sin or something very necessary for our health... Therefore, pray with the faith of a priest: “Lord, I want to stop that sin once and for all and sin no more. Could you give me your hand? Let me rest in your arms. Let me make an everlasting covenant with you!”

St. Alphonsus used to repeat: “Be sure that the priest who prays will become good, virtuous and will be saved. But if he does not pray, intelligent or talented may be, I doubt his virtue, goodness, and even his health.”

Conclusion

Praying is not enough for the priest. He needs to become a man of prayer. To become a man of prayer, what is important is not using flowery words or the art of praying but (1) detachment & withdrawal from the world, (2) practices of piety, (3) mortifications, (4) reflection and meditation. When the heart is clean from being soiled by the world, when it is filled with the things of the Lord, the priest cannot live on earth but will often fly to heaven to see God, to greet him, to speak to him, to familiarize and converse with God. And these will be men of prayer, wondrous, miraculous, all-powerful men!