



★ SALESIAN SPIRIT – ST. CAFASSO'S CONFERENCES
FR. PATHIARAJ RAYAPPAN SDB

ON CONFESSION

(Part 1)



Introduction

The office of preaching is very important and specific to the priest. Preaching is the first and the most powerful weapon that Christ has placed in the hands of a priest: "Go teach all peoples". In preaching, he threatens the transgressors with hell, and he promises heaven to the observant. The wicked are frightened; the sinners are shaken; the lukewarm are enthused, and the good become better. But all these different categories of people feel the need for the preacher to come closer to them and be their director: to give them a hand, to support them, to lead them, to guide them to walk safely on the path which he has preached to them! From being a preacher, he sits now in the Tribunal of penitence and mercy.

The office of the confessor is as important as that of preaching. The priest who wants to do great and noble deeds, let him confess! The priest who wants to make himself most useful to the neighbours, let him confess! The priest who wants to earn a lot of merit, let him confess! The priest who desires to be labouring in the most necessary ministry, let him confess! These are the four principal qualities of the office of the confessor: (1) The office of the confessor is immensely great, more than we can ever imagine. (2) The office of the confessor does immense good to the faithful. (3) It is a source of merit to the one who administers it. (4) It is the most necessary ministry that the priest has been entrusted with by the divine redeemer. We will also see the difficulties raised by priests in this ministry.

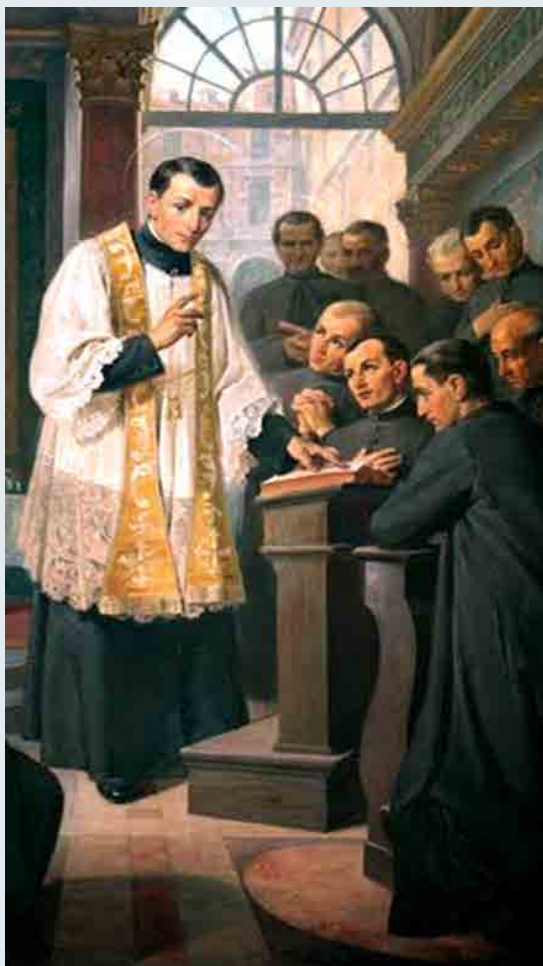
1. EXCELLENCE AND NOBILITY

The office of the confessor and the faculty of forgiving sins is the most excellent among all that can ever be given to a creature. Just as the faculty of creation belongs to only God, so also the faculty of forgiving sins belongs only to God. The faculty of forgiving sins was neither given to angelic spirits nor to the holiest souls on

earth, but only to priests! Let us analyze the speciality of this faculty given to us priests.

(a) The Church in one of her prayers says (Collect of 26th Sunday): Lord, you reveal your mighty power most of all by your forgiveness and compassion. We deduce from this prayer that the act of forgiving is the culmination of God's omnipotence. St. Augustine says: "Forgiveness of the sinner is greater than the creation of heaven and earth! In giving this faculty to the priests, He makes them part of the greatest and the most prodigious thing that His omnipotence can do!"

(b) How does God give this faculty to priests? God gives it in an absolute way, i.e., we can do it and use it alone without Him! He gives it to us without specifying any time or sin or people, even to the extent of binding



Himself from not wanting to use it or to forgive sins without us! Many obtained extraordinary faculties, worked miracles and wonders. Eg, Moses, Joshua, Elijah, Elisha. They obtained what they did through prayer. The priest, instead, does not plead, does not request, does not pray; he acts on his own, as if it were his own power. He does not say "May God forgive you" but "I absolve you; I forgive you". And this faculty and jurisdiction are unlimited: God could have reserved this faculty to a certain class of people or to a certain kind of sins or to a particular time, but no. He left it open to everyone, always and for any sin. It is as if He wanted to divest Himself of this, so that it would be concentrated in us alone. The Council of Trent says: "The Lord Jesus Christ makes priests his vicars, the governors and judges to whom the crimes of mortals must be reported." No sin is forgiven except in this way, i.e., without the confession. It is as if one goes to God and pleads, "Lord, I have sinned, please forgive me", and God tells him, "Excuse me. I have given away my faculty to others. Go and present yourself to the priest, open your heart to him, manifest your pain, and he will pardon you."

2. BENEFITS TO THOSE WHO MAKE CONFESSION

I will not mention all the benefits of this sacrament to society and to families. I will also skip the peace, the tranquility that the sinner acquires at this Tribunal. I will speak only of the most significant gain, which is that of the soul.

We know that the man in sin is a man lost. For him, there is no longer paradise or even God! The creatures, all enraged, would like to exterminate him at once, and he hangs by a thread at the edge of that terrible abyss which is waiting to swallow him up. He resents and approaches the confessor. The priest, having become more powerful than Joshua, who stopped the sun from setting, commands the elements to be silent against him, and they listen to him; he turns to the abyss and closes it; he turns to Heaven and opens its gates. With just one word, he forgives that sinner, reintegrates him, saves him and says, "Go, and the paradise will be yours."

There are indeed many means in the Church to bring the sinner back to the state of grace and salvation: prayer, sermons, exhortations, warnings and the like. But the

one which truly saves is the confession. As long as the priest is praying, advising, threatening, or preaching, we cannot say that someone is saved; someone is said to be saved only when one has made a good confession! The other means prepare one for salvation, but confession truly saves! The confessor deals a deathblow to the enemy, the devil, snatching the sinner from hell, gaining a soul for heaven. What a consolation for the confessor when he manages to snatch one soul! This victory is more than all the victories of all the armies!

A great servant of God said that if he had already one foot in heaven and had been called to confession, he would have withdrawn it immediately to make this gain again. St. Philip Neri, convinced of the great good accomplished by this sacrament, was always ready to hear confessions, everywhere, and he actually heard them to the end. St. John Chrysostom insisted that if anyone wished to go to him for confession, they could even wake him from his sleep.

3. THE CONFESSOR ACQUIRES MERIT

The merit that the confessor acquires for himself by administering the sacrament is great. St. Philip Neri saw in paradise a great multitude of souls saved by him precisely through confession. The merit for a confessor can be intuited from applying what



God promised to those who do corporal works of mercy to the nature and effects of the charity that the priest uses towards souls in the sacrament of penance. God has pronounced so many threats against those who scandalize and lead a soul away from Him: Like a furious bear, He will pounce on the one who has caused a soul to be lost! Contrarily, God will show a great kindness and tenderness for the priest who has saved so

many souls at the cost of many inconveniences, discomforts, and risks to life itself!

What reward can be greater than that of a priest who, burning with zeal for the salvation of souls, puts himself in so many dangers to save others! Let us be sure that such toiling endured for such a noble cause cannot go unnoticed. So let us place ourselves diligently at such an exalted and sublime ministry. It is easy to see that sins are not decreasing; instead, they are increasing every day. These sins can only be eliminated in this way. Therefore, it is necessary that priests truly begin to exercise this ministry, not merely for a pretense, not solely during certain seasons of the year, but diligently, and with all the commitment, at any time, at any hour that the good of souls may require.

(To be continued).