



★ SALESIAN SPIRIT – ST. CAFASSO'S CONFERENCES



One of the means for fighting sin and the principal duty of the priest is that of preaching. The first of the several functions exercised on earth by the Divine Redeemer was that of preaching, and everything else He did supported and sustained this first duty. He commanded the Apostles to preach and confirmed it as he ascended into heaven. They carried it out. They made it amply clear that it was their primary duty at the election of the ministers for the Church, 'so that they could pray and preach without disturbance.' It is proper and inseparable from the apostolate, so much so that 'apostle' and 'preacher'

ON PREACHING

(Part 1)

Fr. Pathiaraj Rayappan SDB

are synonymous terms. Hence, even if the functions of the priest are many and diverse, such as to baptize, to celebrate, to administer other sacraments, that which is proper to him and that which distinguishes him is that he is the preacher. The primary obligation that St. Paul laid on his disciple Timothy was that of preaching: 'preach the Word in season and out of season' (2 Tim 4:2). We should accept this as our obligation.

Preaching encompasses everything in which the priest uses God's Word to instruct, advise, or encourage the faithful in the service of God, whether in public or private, within or outside the Church, in the pulpit, in the confessional, or even in casual conversation. Suppose it is taken in the narrow sense. In that case, preaching refers to that public act, in a more or less solemn form, practised in the Church, when a Bishop or a Priest or another person delegated to that place, and with a distinct vestment, teaches and instructs a certain number of people gathered to listen to him. We shall consider preaching in the second sense.

Today, we do not lament that we lack preaching, but we lament that the preaching is sterile, fruitless. There are many preachings, but there are also many sins, which are increasing every day! Whose fault is it? Is it the fault of the one who listens or of the one who preaches? It is on both sides. Throughout the year, we are aware of the sins that people commit. Today, let us



acknowledge our sin. Let us see the strength and the quality of an apostolic priest, i.e., of a preacher who wants to do good for the souls with his preaching. Let us examine the conditions and precautions that must be followed when exercising it.

The requirements are many, which go to form a preacher, not an eloquent preacher, but one whose preaching is practical and fruitful for the souls. Some requirements revolve around (1) the preacher, others around (2) the content and about (3) the way the Word is broken for the people. We shall begin from the first because it is primary, and without it, others would not have any value.

1. THE PREACHER

The qualities that the preacher should have are the same as the qualities found in the first Preacher, the Divine Redeemer.

(1) The right intention to look only for the glory of God and not to preach one's own self.

(2) To preach first by our life and conduct that which we preach to others by our words.

(3) To accompany our preaching with the power and help of our prayers.

Intention

The goal or intention would reveal the nature and quality of the outcome. If the intention is good (right), then there is every reason to believe that the outcome

will correspond to the aim. It is to be applied also to preaching because (1) it forms the spinal cord and the substance of his being a priest; (2) it is acknowledged by the Lord as his work and is blessed by him; (3) it is the only one which has the power to enter the hearts of people by the spirit and the unction with which the preacher preaches.

The preacher who has this unction and manifests this right intention in his preaching is taken note of, esteemed and preferred by the ordinary people. Both the ignorant and the learned understand this language. Even if all other things are lacking, even if they are almost nonsense, you still realize that his word has a secret, a hidden weight that you cannot help but sense. At times, you do not understand the force of reason, and it does neither convince you nor persuade you, but that unction, that heart which accompanies it, disturbs you, moves you. Two men were talking about a priest. One of them asked if a certain priest preached and how he preached. The answer could have been: well, not well, or more or less. But his was something else: That priest preaches as the manual prescribes, when you pay him! It is clear that in his preaching, there was nothing except the heart, the unction, the spirit, which alone can give the right intention. If he had preached errors or lacked voice or grace or eloquence, the man would have said so, but did not. He wanted to say that he preached materially. He wanted to say that the soul was missing and that his sermon was like a dead body, a corpse and hence useless; probably it was heavy and boring. When we lack the unction, it makes the hearers doubt the truthfulness of what is being preached and whether we ourselves believe what we preach. After hearing a priest preach from the heart, a man exclaimed, 'That priest believes what he preaches!' But don't all the priests do so?

As long as we give importance only to eloquence, language, style, concepts and arguments, the people will not fear us. That which provides us with greater power and makes us far superior to our eloquence is the unction and the heart. It is the spirit, like the divine inbreathing, that the Lord communicates to his Church, to his minister, to his preaching, which neither the art nor the science nor any other effort of the world will be able to reach.

(To be continued)