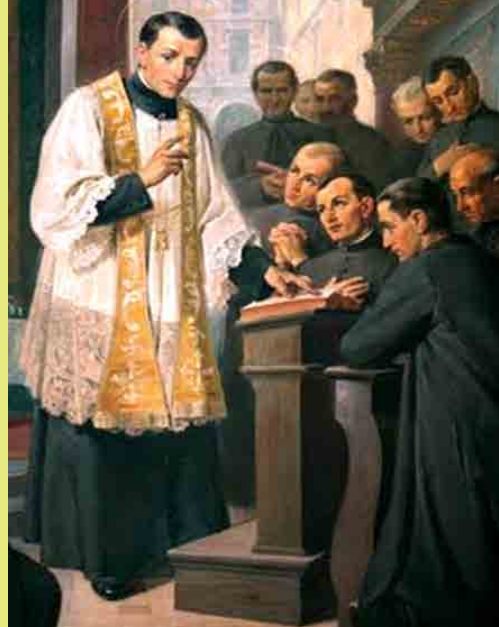




★ SALESIAN SPIRIT – ST. CAFASSO'S CONFERENCES



ON PREACHING

(Part 2)

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Good Example

The other quality that should precede the preacher is his example, i.e., he practices what he preaches. What do people learn from a preacher who is famous but who does not practice what he preaches? They learn to speak nicely and to act wickedly! They learn to talk much about something to others, but to themselves say 'that thing is a sin, but with all that, I want to do it.' The priest learns to speak without shame or blushing, which one feels naturally when praised for something which one does not do! 'He is bold to preach that sermon,' a man said, listening to the preacher who did not give a good example himself, 'don't we know how he behaves!' Screaming at the scandalous while people speak

badly about us, gossip about us on account of 'that' person, for 'that' frequency to a certain family! Should we not feel ashamed about priests who gamble and thus waste time, money, the soul, the conscience... And how can we preach that the people love each other, tolerate, forgive, etc., when they know that among us priests there is a fight and discord to the extent that lay people intervene and try to settle it. Priests are more tenacious and reluctant to approach than anyone else, yet we are the ones who go and preach peace and patience to others, often setting bad examples ourselves.

We preach to others seriousness, devotion, silence in the Church, and that it is wrong for anyone to approach communion without preparation or to leave without thanksgiving. And they see the priest



going to the altar very distracted and leaving the church without making a thanksgiving! Once a priest of this sort was preaching in a place on the occasion of quarant'ore and was making an elenco of the sacrileges committed in receiving communion, and among others was saying that they don't make the needed preparation and thanksgiving. Someone who heard the sermon ended up saying, 'All these sacrileges are only in his head. And if they are true, poor priest, he has to pay for his own action.'

We see that at the moment of listening to the sermon, some person or other comes to our mind who has that particular vice or defect about which we hear in the sermon. Most often, it happens that the preacher himself is infected with that vice! So, his preaching arouses pity in the good, laughter in the wicked. Both the good and the evil would like him to remain silent! It would be much better if he kept quiet because in that way there would be one scandal less to the people and one sin less to the one who preaches! A layman said, 'How well he preaches, if only he practised what he preached, he would be a good priest, a saint!' What a praise for a priest!

The last quality of the priest who wants to preach with good outcome is that he be a man of prayer. It is clear that it is neither the language, nor the words and phrases, nor the eloquence, nor the strength of reasons, nor the graceful manners of the priest that win or touch hearts but rather that grace, that light, that push that comes from above! And that is not ordinarily obtained if one does not pray. On hearing a sermon if you feel that your heart is touched, you may conclude that the preacher is a man of prayer. If the preacher has the right intention which he manifests in his speech, unction & spirit, it is impossible that all this is done and continued without prayer. I recommend that we consider this means not only as habitually necessary, but that we use it as a disposition closest to the exercise of our ministry, so that before appearing in public and/or in the very act of presenting ourselves with lively expressions we should go on repeating, 'Lord, come

and speak in my stead. How do you want a poor instrument to be able to speak worthily of You and for You? Give Lord a little of Your breath so that I do not deviate from Your cause and the good of Your souls.'

Conclusion: When the three conditions indicated above are found in the preacher we can be sure that his words will not be empty; the effect of his efforts cannot fail to be great. However it will always be greater when some other qualities are present and due consideration is given to both the content and the way of announcing it.

2. THE CONTENT

Speaking on the content of preaching, I propose that it be the Word of God. Arguments which are more profane than sacred would be better suited for a scholarly discussion and not for preaching. Certain points could very well be the matter of the pulpit but if they are treated purely from a human point of view, defended and supported by pure reasoning, this is not Word of God. Word of God is only that which has been handed down to us in writing or by tradition and recognised as such and proposed by the authority of the Church. For this reason, I would offer three considerations to be used in proclaiming it to the people.

(1) Adhere to what is established by dogma, by law or by the unanimous consent of the Fathers or theologians and leave out the controversial or doubtful points.

(2) Choose those topics which are best suited to the people who listen to us and those which they need most frequently.

(3) Always give preference to those points, to those maxims which enlarge the heart and help the people to be committed on the path of virtue.

(To be continued)