



★ SALESIAN SPIRIT – ST. CAFASSO'S CONFERENCES

Adhere to the truth

In our preaching let us stick to what is certain, received and accepted by all. There are great inconveniences if we do otherwise. For example, either we state a question to the people or we choose one opinion and according to it we give norms from the pulpit and impose prohibitions.

(1) In the first case the faithful remain more confused than instructed. They do not understand or understand only part of it or do not know what is being done. What a confusion! The differences between theologians are discussed by ignorant people, who have difficulty in understanding and retaining the most straightforward truths! People are scandalised when they hear that some want in one way and that others want it another way, it seems to them that our faith and religion is a thing which is formed and manufactured at the whims and fancies of individuals!

(2) In the other case, wherein only one opinion is touched upon & given as the norm, this manner of preaching is condemned by all. It is distasteful to oblige a man to follow an opinion, whether we hold that he is capable of following it or not. To this add the many sins that are committed through erroneous conscience when one preaches in this way. Listeners receive the opinion as a law, and that which would have been a sin, or at least in doubt, becomes certain for everyone because of the conscience that forms it. This way preaching is repugnant because the theologians say that everyone must embrace and follow the most probable opinion. This probability is in the subject and it varies according to persons, in such a way that it appears to me in one way and to another in another way. So, imposing an absolute obligation, I destroy the system, by taking away the right, in fact the responsibility, that he has to follow that sentence which through one's own persuasion or suggestion of experts can believe it to be such. I would never believe it appropriate to enter into such details in public.

And yet how is one to do it? Must one remain completely silent and leave the people ignorant of so many debatable matters? Can it not be useful if someone talked about it? I reply to all these by taking the middle

ON PREACHING

Part - 3



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way. (1) First of all, a warning: We have many true obligations, duties to be fulfilled by everyone, about which there can be no doubt. Many are unaware of them and many more neglect them and are therefore so many sins are committed every day. So, why to waste time in raising questions, Seeking precepts, imposing obligations which one does not know whether they exist or not, when we already have so many of those which are vilified every day? Let us take the Mass, for example, where there are violations. When we succeed in preventing these true and real sins, let us thank God that we have already done a great thing.

(2) This is the suggestion I give to the one who preaches: when all the certain and universally recognised part of our subject have been exhausted, then you may treat of those that are debatable which are found in the authors. In that, let us avoid the tone of command or of norms, rather take the path of advice. Let us suggest what we can see to be of the greatest advantage for the good of the faithful. Advise those who listen to us, that in such matters each one should speak to his own confessor, who, hearing the particular circumstances and dispositions of each will be able to say, better than the preacher, what should be done in a particular case. For example, speaking of feast days: it would be better to say that which is intrinsically obligatory and let us limit ourselves to suggesting those works which we believe most advantageous and inculcate that each one should arrange his own feast in consultation with his confessor. In this way opinions are respected, laws and sins are spared as much as possible to the penitent and at the same time one provides for one's own needs and his greater advantage.

Choice of topics

The preacher should choose topics which are most useful to the people who listen to us. And among these topics the eternal maxims should be placed the first. Dear brothers, let us repeat often these truths, which are for everyone and which await us all without any

distinction: the importance of saving oneself, the great evil of sin, the approaching death, that which is stored up for us in eternity. These are things which are never sufficiently dealt with and inculcated. I would say that in every sort of preaching, be it catechism, instruction, explaining the Gospel or whatever be our subject, let us try never to end without giving more or less direct reference to some of these great truths. For example, after having given an instruction, conclude with a glimpse of eternal truth: 'What good it would be to know our duty if we did not put into practice? How would it be if this sermon were to give both you and me a day of more serious condemnation and of greater punishment in hell? Reflect carefully and go.' Two words of this kind are worth more than what has been said. Furthermore, ensure that our sermons are practical and touch the attire, not generically but rather of those who listen to us, with all the care however not to damage the person even remotely.



Certain lofty and subtle assumptions, certain theories, the speculative and abstract virtues are good and are nice arguments to deal with but for the most part they leave the person dry! They are not understood. They excite more admiration than the stimulation to practise it. They do not even show the way to practise them. Let us leave aside what may never or very rarely, happen to our people, and let us cling as often as we can to the virtues, sins, and everyday defects, prayer, sacraments, peace, suffering in family, obedience and subordination to elders, the avoidance of idleness, of games and bad companions, bad example, self-love and human respect. Treat these points in a suitable and practical way so that everyone can see in himself the picture that you are painting, know where the evil lies and learn how to remedy it. I know that all this is easily said than done. It will not be so easy and everyone may not be able to do it; but its absence and the lack will always be less and consequently the outcome of our preaching will be greater, when we keep this measure and warning fixed before our eyes.

(to be continued)