



★ SALESIAN SPIRIT – ST. CAFASSO'S CONFERENCES

# ON PREACHING (PART 4)

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## **Eternal Maxims**

Finally, we should give more frequent space in our preaching to those points, those maxims that can attract and enthuse a person to serve God, to flee from vice and to practice virtue. What are they? The very same ones that are most likely to move and touch in human affairs, namely, usefulness, gain and ease. Try to persuade a person that pursuing or abstaining from a given undertaking is very useful to him, and that when he wants to, not only can he do it, but it would not be a great difficulty for him. You no longer need to give him another sermon to persuade him; he is already convinced and does it by himself. Let us try to do the same in our preaching. Let this always be our aim: to persuade and impress upon the heart of the faithful the great advantages, the many wonderful things that they have to expect from the observance of the law of the Lord such as temporal advantages, spiritual advantages, advantages in life, in death, in eternity, peace of heart, internal consolation, family harmony, family prosperity, success in business, in the fields. But the world passes away, life goes out like a lamp, so let us concentrate on greater goods and advantages – the peace and openness with which the one who has waited for serving God dies, the care that the saints, the Angels, Mary and the Lord Himself will have for him on that final day, finally the beautiful paradise that is waiting precisely for the ones who suffered, toiled for God in this world. Our hearts may be moved by these when they are constantly placed before us. I do not know where it can come from, unless it is from us preachers.

Let us speak often and willingly of the tricky part, that the law of the Lord may reveal and highlight the hard work in observing it. Let us not exaggerate things – it is difficult to observe the commandments, challenging to make a good confession, difficult to receive Holy Communion well, difficult even to hear mass with





devotion, difficult to pray as one should, and difficult above all to arrive at salvation, and those who are saved are very few. What happens to so many difficulties if they are exaggerated, amplified or often repeated? The good get worried and discouraged, the wicked lose hope and don't even think about it anymore!

A man who had been away from the Sacraments for a long time, when he was moved to confess, replied that it was useless for him and that it was worth doing nothing. And do you know why? He had heard the sermon that it was very difficult to go to heaven, and that those who get there could be compared to the nuts that escaped the eye of the one who beats the tree! So, he began to reason with himself: 'If it is so, if just a few whom I know to be pious & devout in this town are saved, can I be saved? Will I be one of these very few, I who have done so much evil, may be more than all?' This is how the devil uses these pretexts to keep people away from the worship of God, or at least disturb them. They leave the Sacraments or go less often for fear of receiving them badly, they neglect works of piety, the acquisition of indulgences (because they have heard that it is almost impossible to earn them), they even struggle to hope for heaven, and therefore they work without interest because they have already calculated that it will be challenging to get there!



If it is difficult, it is useless and dangerous to disguise or hide it. (1) First of all, let us guard against blowing up these difficulties when they really exist. Let us not take the example of that preacher who, to prove that a very small number (according to him) would be saved, gave the proof from our Lord, 'many are called, few are chosen'. But in translating it, perhaps in good faith, I made it very grave, 'many are called, very few are chosen'! He may not have done it with malice, but with what effect? These are instances of inattentiveness that the devil can easily turn to his advantage. (2) Secondly, when we cannot do without speaking about what is difficult in the service of God, let us do as the doctor does. When he has to give his patient a somewhat bitter and disgusting medicine, he seasons it with reasoning and spices it so that it does not taste bitter. This is what we must do: express the difficulty very well, but at the same time clothe it with such reflections and feelings that the person does not remain discouraged and dejected.

But will it be difficult or not? It is both easy and challenging, depending on the quality and variety of subjects: easy for all those who have goodwill, openness, and determination to live well and save themselves. When the person has goodwill, God contributes largely and makes him (far from struggling to walk) run and fly without even feeling the difficulty of the journey or

the path. If you ask many good believers who live well, they will respond with a smile and compassion to all the problems which the lukewarm and the wicked fear. They, with their openness, promptness and cheerfulness, convince us that it is not true that it is difficult! This is what we should repeatedly tell the people: the difficulty is more in us than in the thing itself. Therefore, for those who want, it is not difficult. The constant and great help of the Lord, the peace, the contentment which is enjoyed by living well, the spirit, the courage that he acquires – everything makes the path of virtue easy and smooth for the one who sets out to do truly.

And if one encounters some difficult passes, there are many compensations, so much so that the person does not even feel it. And that this difficulty lies in the lack of goodwill, we have it in the same parable where the Divine Redeemer seem to have alluded to the small number being saved. Whose fault was it that few came for the feast of the Master? Was it the Master's? No. He had prepared everything! Was it challenging to get there? No. Not even that. The doors were open. There were only a few steps to reach there. He sent his servants to call them. But they did not go. Why? Because they



did not want to go. Thus, we tell the people not to blame the difficulties, as it is the lazy who always find excuses. Whoever wants can and will do it easily, to the point of enjoying it rather than suffering it. The greatest evil which exists in the world and which we must continually fight against, is that we tend to serve God and the world, to be a little of both. Then it is not only difficult but impossible, and we please neither; we feel the weight of the world and that of the Lord, and we lose the reward of both.

### 3. THE WAY

Finally, let us ensure that our preaching has two qualities: clarity and appeal. (1) Understandable: There is a common complaint among people that they do not understand, and so get bored and leave it. It may partly be their fault due to ignorance. But I am afraid that the fault is even more ours, because we do not make the effort to be understood, and we preach without proper preparation. As a result, we are agitated, we speak without order, and we are confused. What do you expect the people to understand when we ourselves struggle to understand what we have said? At times, we boast, saying that we were not prepared and yet made it: poor Church, poor souls if they had no preachers other than these!

(2) Pleasing: Moreover, the preacher must make an effort so that his way of preaching will be pleasing to those who listen to him. We need various qualities to be pleasing in our preaching, and that all do not depend on us, but to a certain extent we can reach. (i) Clarity: If our preaching is clear, orderly, practical and understandable, we can be sure that more or less it will please the people. (ii) Brevity & respect: Be brief in your preaching and be respectful of the people who listen to you. (iii) Preach to yourself: Even if they are ignorant, they understand that what you say applies to them as well as to you. If something is a sin, and if there is hell for it, there is hell for you, too. (iv) Finally, let us keep in mind the place we occupy in preaching and the duty we have. A jurist who finds himself at the court of the Magistrate to defend the property, the liberty or life of a client, does all he knows and all he can to emerge victorious. We are in a bigger court, sent to defend and support not the affairs of this world but the cause of the Lord, of the Church and of the souls. So, brothers, let us not spare our lives, prayers, work, and tiredness so that our words, which go forth from the pulpit, may be like so many death-blows to Hell and as many victories that we gain for the good of the Church, for the salvation of souls and for the acquisition of the magnificent paradise.

**(The End).**