



★ SALESIAN SPIRIT – ST. CAFASSO'S CONFERENCES  
Fr. Pathiaraj Rayappan SDB



# ON PRIEST'S EXEMPLARY LIFE

(Part 1)

## Introduction

**T**he priest is ordained to combat sin. If he lives, he lives only to fight sin. Whether he studies, prays, or suffers, everything is directed towards making a war on this monster called sin. To succeed in this battle, a priest's first and most indispensable weapon is his own good conduct. If the priest is not exemplary in his conduct, he is not a priest anymore. He is a light that does not shine! He is the salt that has lost its saltiness! He is no longer a teacher because his life does not teach anymore! The Fathers, as well as the Doctors of the Church, demand this quality in a priest. St. Paul told Titus, "Show yourself in all respects a model of good works." (Titus 2:7)

Other professions or careers do not demand this quality. One can have a name and fame in these professions without this quality. A captain, an artist, a sculptor, ... can be reputed in their field without being an example to others in good conduct! But it is not so with a priest. He will never be valued or looked up to as a priest if he does not have good conduct and is not exemplary and blameless!

Exemplarity of the priest

What does the exemplarity of a priest consist of? What is its necessity and importance in the life of the priest?

The exemplarity of the priest refers to two things: the priest's conduct should not provide a license for others to sin (he himself does it, so I can also do it!); it should instead encourage & stimulate others to practice virtue. Therefore, the priest's first responsibility is not to scandalise others or give them an occasion of sin. There are



three types of scandal: (a) Doing a bad thing, looking at which someone else is drawn to do the same bad thing without qualms of conscience. This is truly scandalous. (b) Doing an indifferent thing, looking at which the simple and the delicate are offended! There may not be evil in the thing done, but the ignorant see it as something bad. This is called the scandal of the innocent. (c) Doing something that is not bad but rather good is something bad people take as a sanction for their evil actions. This is called the pharisaic scandal.

We shall not speak about priests who do evil things, i.e., scandalous priests. Truly scandalous priests, thanks be to God, are few. We shall talk about the second type of scandal (doing an indifferent thing which the ignorant consider evil). It appears less dangerous but is nonetheless fatal in its consequences. And this type of scandal is very prevalent among priests. In some

circumstances, the lack of withdrawal from the world and lack of prudence gives the impression of evil. We live with our acquaintances, the staff (women staff) and other people. If we are not careful, we often find ourselves in a situation of scandal!

#### Watch out

(i) Our preferences and some imprudent kindness; a way of exercising authority or familiarity; speaking about someone very highly and frequently; criticising everything that someone does; defending someone with so much passion; ... such ways of doing makes others suspicious of what the person spoke of truly is! You may say that the person referred to is good and has all the qualities and that you do it out of goodwill. It may be true. But it is not our duty to give the person a eulogy. Sometimes, even for what was done out of goodwill, one pays dearly! Goodness, when it is out of place, is not prudent! When goodness is excessive, it is not a virtue but a vice!

(ii) The staff: what is their age? How are they dressed? Who is that lady who accompanies?

(iii) We, priests, are usually accused of being greedy! But where does it come from? The clamouring for things, having a cut on expenses, demanding every right... these are the ones that give rise to such scandalous gossip. If I do not have a significant income, I should regulate myself! If I make demands, it is no longer my property and is not within my limits. Remember that sometimes there is an obligation to suffer some temporal inconvenience than to give scandal!

(iv) Animosity between priests: not even greeting, avoiding skillfully, excusing oneself to avoid meeting that person, absenting oneself on certain occasions... Is it not a scandal? People notice it easily. Some laugh it over. Some groan at the bad edification. My dear priests, it is not enough not to do evil, but it is necessary not to give even an impression of evil! It is not enough not to hate; it is essential not to give even a little space for suspicion.

(v) A lady visits the priest's house. There will be a good reason for it, and you will avoid all evil. But the people don't know it. The frequency, the age, the hour in which she comes, the air with which she speaks, ... Or the priest often goes to a house where there are women, where they play, converse, and laugh. Those people do not come to the Church, do not do even Easter duties, and do not observe abstinence. They speak ill of priests, who gossip! Why don't you visit all the houses in the same way? Why don't you do the same for all families?

*(To be continued).*