



Introduction

The 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 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!

Helpful tips

One can cause a real scandal even without doing an evil deed! So, how can we avoid scandal? What can serve us as a norm?

(1) Avoid what may be perceived as evil

If an action may cause scandal because of the circumstances or the weakness or ignorance of others, we have to be sensible and avoid what may be perceived as evil. You may say that your conscience is clear and that if others are scandalised, they are responsible for it! How often have we dealt with such problems in confessions and sermons? Why should we search for a different rule only for ourselves? If you must continue despite the scandal, there must be a grave reason. But charity does not permit us to give an occasion of sin even for the evil-minded person. This is the norm given by all the theologians.



ON PRIEST'S EXEMPLARY LIFE

(Part 2)

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(2) Be ready for sacrifice

The priest should know that he is always carefully watched from head to foot. So the priest must conduct himself well always and in all things. If a relationship with a person or a family, the way of behaving, the entertainment availed, the expenditure incurred, ... make others speak badly, gives an occasion to think negatively of me or the priests, ... the priest has to stop it, so that every flawed interpretation will be stopped. This is what is said by all the saints. St. Paul first said it: he would not eat meat if someone is offended by it (1 Cor 8:13). He did not distinguish case by case or if there was a motive; he said, 'No if it gave scandal'. The priest should reason in this way and accordingly regulate his life. When the priest reaches this point of exemplariness, he will certainly give rise to good feelings and esteem for the good and the exercise of virtue.

(3) Order your life

The priest has to practise this virtue regularly if he wants to reach a level of not giving any reason for scandal. What does it mean? He has to regulate the hours of his sleep, his expenses, and the way he dresses. He has to consider many things and suffer privations when availing of entertainment. He often has to renounce his genius, tendencies & inclinations. He has to live withdrawn from the world, far from the hustle and bustle of the time. He has to be exact in discharging his duties with devotion and modesty.

He has to mould his life and days in a blameless way.

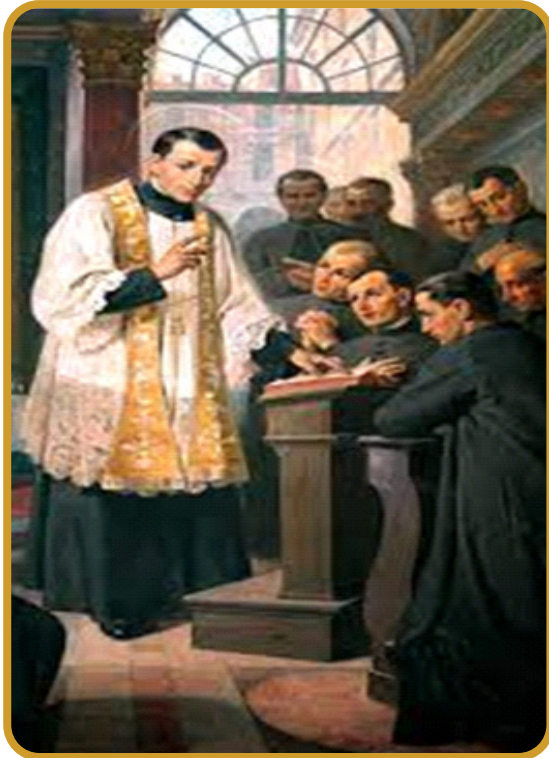
The Council of Trent says that bishops, priests, and deacons compose their lives and manners to be blameless. This is not an exhortation, counsel, or merely for a greater perfection; it is an absolute necessity: 'You must be blameless.'

The honour of the Church he serves, the good of the people for which he works, the glory of God which he tries to procure, ... all demand this exemplarity. The Holy Mother, the Church, takes the priests to be



her firstborn sons and to be affectionate towards her. We know that a virtuous, balanced, blameless, and holy child is a great consolation and honour for the mother. Every virtue, every applause or compliment of the child is seen as the virtue, applause and praise of the one who educated the child. On the contrary, a naughty, distracted, immoral son causes immeasurable pain to the poor mother. And it is a disgrace and a dishonour for the entire family.

Dear friends, let us try to be very considerate towards our mother, the Church, till the end of our lives. The favours she has granted us are innumerable; her sufferings on our behalf are indescribable. Let us not make her more bitter; instead, let us try to console her, comfort her and help her in her many battles, not only in our words, sermons and writings but more so in our actions, with our dress, with our exemplary and blameless behaviour, so that whoever sees a priest, from his goodness, virtue and example may enquire and believe in the goodness and holiness of the mother who raised him and respect, esteem and honour her. And this good mother will know how to reward our love and concern for her.



Salvation of souls

The Council of Trent affirms that the exemplary life of the priest is a permanent sermon for the people. The Fathers of the Church affirm that there is nothing better to attract and enthuse people to piety and worship of the Lord than the exemplary life of the priest. This is my personal experience, too. But it takes courage. A layman once told a priest, "You tell that priest to do what you do not do!" With what face will a priest (in his homily, confession or private conversation) advise another to abstain from gambling, drinking, worldliness, and idleness when he himself is given in to all these? How can a priest counsel someone to obey his parents when he himself does not obey the Canon law, the provisions of the Church or the commands of the superiors? How will he be able to inculcate attendance at the sacred functions or holy observance of the days of the Lord when he wastes his time in idleness and foolishness and chatting away?

Let us ask what effect a non-exemplary priest's advice, corrections and homilies have on the people.

Even the most vulgar people cannot help but acknowledge that an exemplary priest is a priceless person in the world. Exemplarity surpasses knowledge, skill, prudence and wealth.

Instead of drawing tears to their eyes, it attracts cynical smiles. A layman once told his neighbour as he heard a priest's sermon, 'If this priest would listen, we know what to preach to him!' Once, in a sermon, a priest, who was not exemplary, lamented that the parishioners were no longer what they used to be, that the chariot could not go on and that it badly needed a repair! A man withdrew and said to his neighbour, "I agree with him on this. But it would be better to reform the rudder first of all. Look at what he does and its results; he starts to rebuke others when he is to be blamed!"

Dear friends, preach, scold and thunder if you want, but realise that the example is worth more than all the reasoning and logic of the world. The wicked know far better than anyone else the force of a good example by a priest. So, when they know that the priest is exemplary and they perceive that he is an obstacle to their plans, they do everything possible and deny his virtues. When they fail, they say that it is a pretence, hypocrisy and that he has a hidden agenda, etc. And when they want to destroy a person, seeing that all other means have proved useless, they take up the example, true or false, of the priest! Because they know that it is the strongest weapon.

Conclusion

The people are very grateful to the Lord if they are blessed with an exemplary priest who is attentive to the Church and his duties, withdrawn, affable, courteous to all, and carries out church services with decorum and modesty. Even the most vulgar people cannot help but acknowledge that an exemplary priest is a priceless person in the world. Exemplarity surpasses knowledge, skill, prudence and wealth. So dear brothers, if we want to do good for the salvation of souls, if you want to bring consolation to our mother, the Church, there is only one way: lead an impeccable, exemplary and blameless life. And the way to achieve it is to desire it sincerely.