



★ SALESIAN SPIRIT – ST. CAFASSO'S CONFERENCES

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On Having a Delicate Conscience

- Part 2

Everyone forms his conscience from his state and condition and regulates himself according to that. The soldier cultivates the conscience of a soldier, fisherman that of a fisherman, the shopkeeper that of a shopkeeper, ... in the same way the priest should cultivate the conscience of a priest and govern himself according to it! Sir 44:6 tells us what priests should be: "Rich in virtue, outstanding scholars and lovers of their beauty and splendour." And since we are no longer of this world, the love and study of our beauty must be completely different from that of the fleeting and transitory one down here, but of another immensely greater and more precious one, which is spiritual, internal, one which will never fail and which will make us glorious men, shining not only before the world but before God, the examiner of the hearts and the just evaluator of virtues. Let us look at the people of the world. What they do to appear beautiful: it is almost a martyrdom – they have to be industrious and patient; they make sure that everything is clean and in proper order; and what all things they use (the tools, ointments, flowers, decorations, ...) and how much time they take to compose so that it does not annoy anyone ... and yet all these are done willingly and cheerfully!

MEANS TO PURITY OF CONSCIENCE

(1). The first means to keep ourselves delicate of conscience and to have an aversion to & abhorrence of sin is to meditate on it often, to be convinced of it and to understand well what a great evil it is, how it is unbecoming of a priest (who attends to God closely, who speaks, relates and converses continuously with God) to make small insults to His Lord.



I speak about the one who puts aside what is purely a matter of confession and does not allow the confessor to know anything of his tendencies, inclinations, or temptations, ... so that the confessor can give guidance.

This meditation will enlighten us and make us aware of the gravity of sin, guiding us towards a delicate conscience.

(2). The second means to have purity of conscience and to avoid falling easily into sin is to deprive oneself (mortification) from time to time, even of what is lawful or permissible (so that one does not land up in what is unlawful). Is it possible to avoid only what is strictly unlawful? Let us say a priest wants to avoid only what is sinful and does not care about the rest! Take him for a fallen priest! The distinction between that which is sinful and that which is not is good in theory, but in practice, it is deceptive. It is truly a trap to make one fall: (1) We are often deceived in conscience and falsely say that something is not a sin when it is actually a sin! (2) Because once the action begins, it is not so easy to stop it – the passions, the world, the companions, the precipitation ... all these carry us away to where we never imagined we would land up, and this is a daily occurrence! (3) Because the extremity of safety is already dangerous! It is like walking on the extremity of the road (close to the precipice). One day or other, we will fall into the ditch! So, the delicate priest guards himself from sin and everything that can lead to it. Then he is safe! How can one do it? One who wants his tongue from going into excesses should make sure now and then to talk a few words less and eat a few slices less! One who wants to home his eyes, deprive it even of the pleasant, honest and lawful curiosities! One who wants to be safe from the world should remain withdrawn and hidden by choice!

(3). The third means is frequent examination of conscience. A shopkeeper who wants to be correct in his business examines regularly to avoid making mistakes

and often checks and counterchecks his transactions to see if everything is in order. A priest should do this if he wants to keep his conscience clear, delicate and clean. If the priest does not examine himself and does not remedy mistakes, one fault will lead to another, small one to a grave one, and he will end up finding himself tainted. How to examine? Throughout the day, even in the midst of our occupations, we get into the habit of going over our main actions and seeing how we have behaved and if everything was correct. If not, repent. [Example. You heard confessions: How did you do it? Did you listen carefully? Did you overstep borders in your words or actions?]

(4). The fourth means, which is very effective and indispensable, is the use of the sacrament of confession. There are three common dominant defects in us priests about the sacrament of confession: (a) Less frequency, (b) Superficiality, and (c) Lack of confidence in the confessor.

● Frequency: There is no obligation to confess if there is no mortal sin, but if the priest does not go for confession, he gives scandal to people! The possible frequency

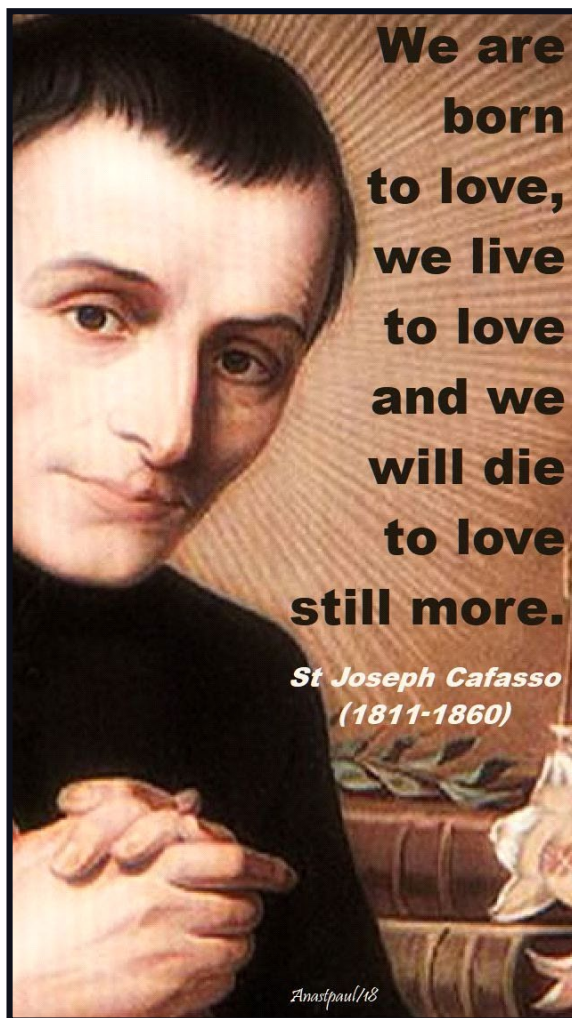
is once a week, once in two weeks, once a month, once in two or three months, once in six months, once a year. Of these, what is prudent to follow? Once a week. Why is it good? The Church recommends and praises it, and you can gain those indulgences! One who wants to be delicate in the cleanliness of his body and dress does not wait to bathe or wash till he is dirty! That's what we must do! If one is unable to go because of distance, at least make it every month. And for every week you could not go, compensate it by a day of fasting or mortification or a more extended visit to the blessed sacrament. In that way, you could be said to be confessing every week. This stress on frequent confession makes us feel accountable and responsible for our actions, fostering a delicate conscience.

● Superficiality in confessing may be because we do not have serious things to confess; perhaps because we confess often; maybe because we listen to others' confessions and are familiar with these things! Many times, we confess because it is time (as you would go to eat) or because there is a chance (there is a confessor). It is not sacrilegious to confess like this, but there is a great danger, and there is no advantage drawn from it because even in venial sins and free material, we should have sorrow for them! This is what is lacking in priests who confess superficially.

● The lack of confidence is a common defect in us priests. I am not talking about not revealing serious and necessary matters, but of those who (when something humiliating happens) do not hide it but phrase it in such a way that the confessor finds it difficult to understand it. They cannot be in peace and enjoy the fruit they would have had if they were more sincere. I speak about the one who puts aside what is purely a matter of confession and does not allow the confessor to know anything of his tendencies, inclinations, or temptations, ... so that the confessor can give guidance. It is true that these do not strictly belong to confession, and it is not a sin to avoid telling them! But we deprive ourselves of the great help to our advantage and for our growth in the delicacy of conscience.

These few means help us to have the delicacy of conscience, which St. Paul calls, 'the glory of the priest' (2 Cor 1:12): "This is our glory, the testimony of our conscience." To this, add the reward promised to the pure of heart: "Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God." (Mt 5: 8).

May God grant that our heart be such as to merit this glory and peace on earth and one day arrive in Heaven to see it, love it and praise it forever.



**We are
born
to love,
we live
to love
and we
will die
to love
still more.**

*St Joseph Cafasso
(1811-1860)*



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