



★ SALESIAN SPIRIT – ST. CAFASSO'S CONFERENCES – 10

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Sin is the greatest evil. It tries to destroy God. It emptied paradise! Hell was created for it! But, there is even a much worse evil: ignorant of its great evil and incalculable harm, people sin with great ease. They even go so far as to make a joke out of it and boast about it! Sin is not forgiven, if it is not detested and how to detest if we don't know it?

If that is the case for ordinary people, what can we say about priests who live in sin?!? Let us explain it with an example. If an ordinary soldier is unaware of or ignores a battle plan's importance, dangers, and consequences, it would not be considered serious. But what if the Commander or the Captain does not know? ... does he have anything to hope for?!? Similar is the situation of the unfortunate priest who has been chosen, formed and sent to the earth to cure and fight the many sins committed in the world, and he does not know, does not even care to know,

ON PRIESTLY ZEAL

We distinguish in the priest two persons: Private (he is like anybody else) and Public (Consecrated for the common good). God has set him apart for a great scope. What is the priest reserved for? God wants everyone to be saved. If God has placed someone on earth to save others, it is the priest. (1) The divine Redeemer gave him this mission: "Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature" (Mk 16:15). (2) The divine Redeemer came to destroy the reign of sin (Jn 12:31). He entrusted this to us priests. Dear priests, this is the aim and the objective of the priest on earth – to fight against sin. The priest must be involved in this fight with total zeal until his last breath.

1. IGNORANCE OF SIN AND ITS EVIL

Many sins are committed because of the ignorance of sin being a great evil, and so many souls are lost.

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what sin is and the great evil that it is, for time and eternity! Dear brother priests, let us not stop meditating on the consequences of sin till the end of our lives because we have the primary obligation to fight it and prevent it so that sins do not increase on earth.

2. OBLIGATION TO PREVENT SINS

The priest has the obligation as well as the ability to prevent sins. "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel," said St. Paul (1 Cor 9:16). Woe to the priest who does not work for this goal! He would be guilty. He must account for every sin he did not try to prevent when he could. The priest must preach. And in preaching, if he is careful and diligent, many would stop sinning or would at least sin less. How many sins would be wiped out if the priest was diligent, patient, and loving in the confessional? If the people are



reluctant, if they go less frequently for confession, if they confess the same sins over and over again, ... the priest will have to give an account of it. If the priest edifies the people, he prevents many sins! Let him prepare to give an account of it.

A son would be guilty if he injures his father or offends him. He would also be guilty if he did not prevent others (when he could) from offending his father. A labourer would be guilty of the damages that he caused to the vineyard of his master, and he would also be guilty of the work he omitted or the damages he permitted others to commit. The priest's situation is similar. By virtue of our priesthood, we are duty-bound to be zealous about the interests of God. The priest should ensure that none offend him.

Do priests have this zeal? I do not know! St. Paul told Timothy (1 Tim 4:14), "Do not neglect the grace ... which was given to you through prophecy with the laying on of hands by the council of elders." Looking at the priests of his time, St. Bernard found in them rather the zeal to preserve their own name and dignity, the zeal to acquire riches, but not the zeal to prevent sin and save souls! Dear brothers, if we, too, search for priests who have the zeal and fire to secure their

rights, get a post, succeed in business, and profit, ... I believe we would easily find them. Priests who have great commitment and zeal for their own esteem and honour, for the comforts of home, for the dignity of relatives, ... I believe there would be many. Will we be able to find easily priests who know the great evil that sin is, who are filled with the horror of sin, who are pained by the suffering that is caused by sin, who, by their ministry, good example and prayer, prevent some sin and offence to the Lord? If we do not do so, we will only look like priests, appearing to be priests and nothing more.

This zeal for souls is so essential in us priests so much that it forms the very substance of our priesthood. The priest's rank, honour, and character are one thing; the true priesthood, the practice that consists of the apostolate and in the exercise of our ministry (the purpose for which it was instituted), is another. So, without this priestly zeal, we will only be namesake priests!

In the desert, wherever the Jews camped, God ordered the Levites to camp near and around the Tabernacle (Num 1:53). Why? They were like guards of honour and defence to keep the irreligious away and prevent irreverence or offence. And the priests are the successors of the Levites!

What would you say of a bodyguard of the king, on seeing certain rebellious subjects insulting the king, did not care and let them do it or laughed at it? Anyone would say: "Cowards and ungrateful! Why do you wear those uniforms, occupy that post and get paid if you do not defend your king?" Similar would be the reproach of a priest with no zeal to prevent offences to the Lord as much as he could.

We should prevent offences against the Lord with gentleness, love, prayers and, when necessary, with our authority. And when we are unable to prevent it, we should shudder within ourselves, be angry, sigh, moan, and cry for the shame that we see done to our God. A priest with such zeal, assigned anywhere and in any ministry, will work miracles to defend His God. He may not be very learned or eloquent, he may not have much grace and manners, and he may not be healthy, ... but he has that zeal, which is enough. He is a true soldier! Priests without this zeal will be priests only in name.

(To be continued) ■