



★ **LESIAN SPIRIT – ST. CAFASSO'S CONFERENCES – 8**
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ON PRIESTS SOCIALIZING

(II Part)



Another kind of socializing which we have described as lawful and honest and which the priest may avail with due caution are those devoid of the dangers and vices mentioned above, i.e., neither by their nature nor by the persons who are there present any danger of evil. It is easy to say this, but it won't be easy to find such a place, a group, or a get-together of lay people who know how to control their tongue and stay within the boundaries of honesty, charity, and religion! In these places, staying within the limits of lawfulness and honesty is impossible. The priest may take part in it with due reserve and caution: (a) Be careful that the time that you consume in socializing is not excessive; if excessive, it is to be condemned. (b) The priest should not say or do anything that demeans his nature and character as a priest. Listen to the advice of St. Hillary: "You should have only words of peace, purity, piety and charity!" (c) The priest should know that he will always leave a loser from that gathering and conversation! (Imitation of Christ, I, 20,2). You will lose interior peace and concentration. In the eyes of the same people and family members, you will lose the dignity of your state as a priest. You will diminish the internal devotion of the mind wherein peace and union with the Lord lie. "It weakens the desire and the commitment to move forward; the comforts of the world entice it, makes prayer tedious and boring." (St. Bonaventure). We can affirm that when we threw ourselves more with secular people, our day was certainly lukewarm, colder and more dissipated. This is why St. Basil left the world and broke off those relationships!

PERMISSIBLE SOCIALIZING

Moses was a great man; he could familiarly talk with God, the elements respected him, he turned water into blood, he made water gush forth from the rocks, he divided the sea, he opened the earth to swallow up the guilt and yet the Hebrews went as far as to stone him. It was because Moses let himself be seen, talked, spoke, and became familiar with them, even if he behaved in an irreprehensible way. This sight and its frequency were enough for people to no longer have that respect and reverence that he deserved (Tertullian).

Another passage of the Holy Scripture confirms the same thing. Judges 13:2ff. An angel appeared to Manuel's wife to announce that she would bear a son. She ran to her husband and said, "A man of God came to me, having the countenance of an angel and told me ..." Manuel told her, "If he returns, find out who he is, from where does he come." He returns, and she comes to her husband, "The man whom I had seen before, ..." 'A man!' See the difference in the woman's words. First, she called him a man of God, and second, 'the man I had seen before!' Talking to him, conversing with him, he no longer made an impression on her as at the first encounter, and already that great idea and concept that had been formed had disappeared! The same happens every day in the world: the first time that Priest goes to that gathering, he introduces himself to those people; oh, what a feeling, what a celebration! He is a man of God. He is considered a great blessing; everyone regards him as an Angel, and his words are collected as manna and preserved like a treasure! But let the priest go there at other times, continue and much more frequently, you will see where that 'man of God' will end up: 'Man of God' goes 'man' remains! No one notices the 'priest' any more, as if he were an ordinary man, and soon, he will become more of a burden and an annoyance ... The family agrees as to what to do so that he never comes there again! One might say, 'I don't go if they don't invite me'. They invite you with words, but what do they have at heart? This, one must understand!

Know that we priests are like water: as long as it remains within its banks and is not disturbed, everyone is fortunate to have this water close by, and each priest goes there in his own time to draw some water for his use! But everything is reversed if it breaks its banks and flows into the countryside and to those not looking for it. Everyone flees from it and tries to protect oneself from the damage it can cause. Apply it to the priest, literally!

PRAISEWORTHY SOCIALIZING

The last kind of socializing is to be esteemed by the priest: good, praiseworthy and holy. This includes all those ways which the zealous priest cleverly invents to get in touch with the people, to be useful & beneficial to their souls, and to win them over to the Lord. Whether he talks to them on the road or goes to their homes, he may talk, familiarize, or play with them – nothing matters. This is a



conversation as a saint, priest, and apostle; therefore, it is good, praiseworthy, advantageous and dutiful. But it is difficult. There are three qualities of this domestic or family apostolate: (a) It is essential, (b) It is the duty of every priest, and (c) It is beneficial and advantageous.

- It is essential. When the Lord sent the Apostles to preach, he did not intend preaching only in the Churches and pulpits! The primary way in which they would have operated would have been to try to introduce themselves, to mix with the people, and to speak to them as and when there was an opportunity about the law of the Lord. St. Paul recommended Timothy to evangelize in the same way: "Be an example to the faithful in good conversation." (1 Tim 4:12)

- It is the duty of every priest. The priest, as you know, is the world's light and the earth's salt. This quality is incarnate in him, and he carries it with himself always in such a way that whether he is in the Church, at home, on the road, or in the countryside, he has to give light and add taste with his good example, words, advice, corrections as the opportunity presents itself and this is his apostolate, so that the beautiful praise given to St. Catherine of Siena, can be said of each of the priests: 'no one approached her without becoming better.'

- It is useful and advantageous. This is very useful, and it can be done anytime and anywhere. The other ways of evangelizing are done only on certain days and at fixed hours. But this one happens at every moment, and every place becomes the pulpit. What a sermon! For the ordinary person, this is more useful than what he hears from the pulpit because what is preached from the pulpit is taken for his duty, and people who go there are not always eager to listen! But here, it happens suddenly and unexpectedly, and this touches that person, and he listens!



But this apostolate requires the priest to have many strong virtues. (a) Prudence is to know the opportunity and apt way of presenting oneself, enjoying oneself, and at the same time achieving one's intention. And this requires study and work. One word (this word better than another; well-chosen) in these cases is more important than a hundred in a sermon. (b) The virtue of fortitude is to not worry about human respect and to be strong enough to face dangers that we may face in the world. (c) The virtue of patience and mortification is not to be worried about our comforts and to suffer repulsions and mortifications. (d) The virtue of zeal and charity makes us study and find successful ways to keep us alert and prepared for this type of mission and preaching because it is not the time, the reasons, or the technique that wins but love!

How do we have all these virtues to exercise this apostolate so specific to the priest?

(a) First, socialize with the Lord before socializing with men (Wis 8:16). Pray, continue to pray, and be men of prayer at home, in the Church, at the foot of the Cross, before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. (b) Meditate on our state, on our obligation, our duties. (c) Meditate on the value of souls, the ways and means to save them, and the great prize reserved for the one who saves them. (d) Study and meditate on the advice and example that our leader and master have given. When the heart is full of these maxims, be sure of the Spirit that will be poured everywhere, every minute, on everyone. Every word, action, and look will be a word of piety, purity, and charity that will touch, win, and save the souls. And the people will be surprised and say: This is certainly a man of God because he treats, speaks, and socializes in this manner. Amen, so shall it be. ■