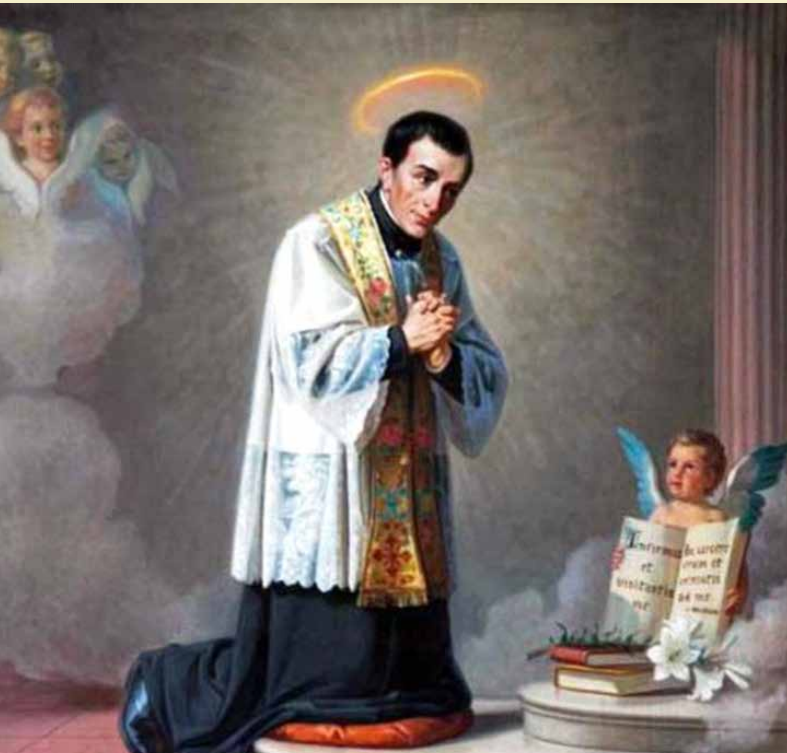




★ SALESIAN SPIRIT – ST. CAFASSO'S CONFRENCES – 6

Fr. Pathiaraj Rayappan SDB



THE SENSE OF THE SACRED

- Part- 2

We have already seen in the last issue (in part 1) that the priest's sense of the sacred is essential. Also, we will discuss where and when this sense of the sacred will shine.

The sense of the sacred consists of these:

(a) Love and respect for sacred places. Those who truly love a place will go there often and remain there happily. The Church is such a place for the priest. If he goes there only to say Mass, and apart from Mass, he is not seen there; when he goes there, if he is distracted and bored (minutes look like hours!), what does this prove?

The Church is the dwelling place of the Supreme Lord God, surrounded by the angels and saints! It is heaven transplanted on the earth! So, what reverence

and fear should we have for the Church? "Observe my Sabbaths and have reverence for my sanctuary. I am the Lord." (Lev 26:2). So, woe to the one who does not respect God's sanctuary! Let us take a look at how some of us enter the Church. One enters and moves about without the slightest sign of genuflection or sign of the Cross! He was very distracted, as though he were in a public park! Such priests are few, but these few are sufficient to cause a loss of respect and decorum for the sacred places! How can we expect ordinary people to form a good idea of these places when they see the priests behave in this way? A priest had this way of entering, walking about and going out. A layman, not very devout, saw him and told the others: "It would have been better had he become a soldier!" Our way of entering the Church should always be devout and

dignified. Once in the Church, we should always remember that we are in the presence of God and behave in a worthy manner: no chatting, no conversation; keep the eyes lowered and composed; not lazy; not drowsy. This is the best way to show respect to the Churches and, at the same time, to teach it to the people who come there.

(b) Love and respect for the liturgical functions. Some of these are honorific & dignified, while others are not. Some bring remuneration, and others do not. Some are easy, while others are difficult & burdensome. The priest who has a sense of the sacred will lend himself indiscriminately to all functions and carry them out with equal care. Suppose we celebrate some liturgical tasks because there is some remuneration, even if we are the most devout celebrants. In that case, the people do not make much of it – at the most, they'll say that we did things well, but since they know that there is some money involved, it appears to them that the money was the cause of our devotion! Instead, if they see us devout and eager to participate in other devotional practices such as vespers, listening to a sermon, receiving blessings, and taking part in processions, ... then even though they are bad-willed, they will be able to conclude that we have the faith and that we know the value of those sacred functions!

We need to be aware of certain things about the way we carry out liturgical functions:

- When we want to know the value and importance a person gives to what he does, we observe how he carries it out! To the level that we are devout, the people understand the meaning, the value and the merit of our liturgical actions.

- People read our devotion on our faces, in our eyes, and in our bodies. Once, a layman told his companions after Mass, "It was a little long, but that does not matter; it was good." He was alluding to the priest's modesty and seriousness.

- It seems that in the pagan celebrations, one was appointed specifically to raise his voice from time to time to remind the priest to pay attention to what he did. We need to constantly remind ourselves of what we are doing!

We, priests, should be dignified in what we do! Let us start from the sacristy:

- The insulting way of dressing and putting aside sacred vestments as if they were dead weight, ... laughing and fooling about ... This is unsuitable for the priest who wants to love and esteem the holy functions.

- Going to and returning from the Altar with hasty steps, looking to the right and to the left, winking at some people ... By this, you are not paying respect to the sacred place and sacred functions.

- Distributing communion hurriedly as if the hosts were on fire or gave an electric shock! ... A sign of

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the Cross that no one can decipher! ... At the celebration of baptism or other sacraments, eyes are not controlled; eyes roam about on those which are not to be seen! ... By decorum, you respect the person and the place.

● Holy Mass: All the rubrics have to be followed. To omit or change anything is to be considered a sin! So, prepare for Mass and do the Thanksgiving after Mass (15 minutes). Do not celebrate Mass if you are in mortal sin without going for confession. If no chance, at least a perfect act of contrition.

(c) Love and esteem for all the practices of piety promoted by the Church. First among them is the use of the sacramentals: holy water, meditation on the Way of the Cross, the recitation of the Holy Rosary, being part of a pious society, the recitation of the Angelus, prayer before meals, etc. These are good and beautiful, made for laypeople. But the priest should also practice them (unless he has other engagements). Reason: can one be a priest without such practices? Yes, theoretically! But in practice, I do not see it. I know the contrary: good, virtuous, holy priests use these practices!

Those practices to which indulgences are attached must be included under the sense of the sacred. Indulgences are a true remission of the temporal punishment due to our sins. We, priests, more than anyone else, have the

convenience and the opportunity because we are already men of the Church and men of prayer, and it is enough for us to add the intention!

3. THE DANGERS OF NEGLIGENCE

What should the negligent priest fear? What can the servant who does not care for the master's house and who omits or does badly his services expect? Punishment! God does the same with us, priests!

God is offended by the irreverence in the Churches. We will be punished more severely, just as the irreverence of a minister of the King compared to a peasant. Punishments made to ancient priests for irreverence were terrible: Hophni & Phineas are called 'children of evil!' It is said that their sin was great and that they distanced people from God (1 Sam 2:12, 17). "I can no longer stand looking at you in the way in which you serve me." (Is 1:13) "I will scatter over your face the dung of your solemnities, and I will curse you with your blessings" (Mal 2:3). "Cursed is the one who does the work of God negligently" (Jer 48:10). "The Lord will bring those who decline in obligations with those who work iniquity" (Ps 124:5).

CONCLUSION

Let us cultivate a sense of the sacred in ourselves: respect sacred places, carry out liturgical functions with devotion, and esteem everything that gives honour and glory to God so that the people may be touched by our devotion, seriousness, and composure and may praise God: "Great is our God who has such worthy ministers." ■