



★ SALESIAN SPIRIT: ST. CAFASSO'S CONFRENCES – 4
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Introduction

We have seen the exterior of the priest: Modesty & mortification. Now, we shall see the interior of the priest, the heart of the priest. The heart of the priest is like the tabernacle of the living God. So, it should be adorned with every sort of merit and virtue. Before this adornment, first of all, we must empty the heart of all that which is not in conformity with this heart and hence is useless (superficiality, worldliness, earthliness) because we cannot be of the world as well as of God, i.e., we need to be detached from the world. How to flee the world? Through withdrawal and solitude!

1. The need for flight from the world

We learn the need to flee the world from what Jesus told the apostles, the first priests: "You are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world" (*Jn 15:19*). Be convinced of this.

What sort of detachment from the world is meant here? It is the detachment from the love for the world. It is detachment of heart and mind from the love of the world. Take out of your mind worldly ideas, worldly values (e.g., competition, power, position, money, wealth, influence ...) and worldly affairs (e.g., celebrations of one's achievement, ...). Do not love what the world loves, what the world goes after and what the world longs for. The priest should not think as the

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world thinks; he should not esteem what the world esteems (external appearance, pomp, show); he should not seek what the world greedily seeks after (power, position, good food, enjoyment).

Why should the priest be detached from the world? (1) What is in the world? *1 Jn 2:16* says: "the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and pride of life". And what do we find in man's heart: sensuality, desire for pleasure, desire for things, arrogance, the will to dominate! (2) The priest must understand that the world is transitory and that another world awaits us, which is eternal and infinitely greater. The world does not and cannot understand this. That is the foolishness of the world. (3) *2 Cor 2:12*: "We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God." i.e., we choose God as our inheritance, as our portion. We have chosen God and choose not to have anything to do with this world. (4) The one convinced of the beatitudes is detached from the world!

The detachment from the world is not merely in 'thinking'! It should be seen in our way of life, i.e., in practice: how much importance and

weightage we give to the things of the world, the way we deal with it, and the effect it has on us! For, Can a priest be said to be detached from the world if he is always talking passionately about worldly things, wine, drinking, parties, things he bought, things he has acquired with calculated moves and even at the expense of recollection, which is necessary for the interior life of the priest?

2. The benefits of detachment

Flight from the world does not mean bodily being removed from the world! But it means to be withdrawn

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in one's own home and room, living a hidden, silent and cloistered life (as opposed to leaving the home & room for unworthy reasons). If this withdrawal goes missing, the priest will be like a river that has broken its banks, flowing without direction. If this solitude is lacking, the priest will go here and there, sit idle, talk, laugh, joke, carry tales, go hunting, parties, games, ...

Why do we need to flee the world?

(a) to save our conscience, (b) to preserve our reputation.



(a) To save our conscience: The world corrupts our conscience.

The streets of the world are muddy. One cannot walk on them without getting dirty. Those who stay at home keep their clothes clean! Even if stained, the stains are slight and can be easily washed. The same thing happens to the conscience of the priest. St. Ambrose: "The homebound priest is like a river flowing within its banks. Its waters are clean and pure. Instead, the priest who refuses to be homebound is like the river that overflows its banks. It runs uncontrolled across the countryside. Its waters are dirty with all sorts of filth!" St. Leo the Great: "Worldly dust soil religious hearts."

There was a monk who did not know how to stay at home; the cell was the most painful prison for him; he wandered in the countryside; then he walked in the towns and cities, looked at everything, chatted with whoever it was ... Another monk took him aside and told him: "the people are scandalized; remember that in this way the religious always loses; so, leave the world and live a little more withdrawn." And the monk replied: "My dear, these are mere nothings. You have a sick mind. You are scrupulous. One needs to have a clear conscience and the right intention in everything. This pleases God." The other monk threw up his hands, exclaiming, "God, may you be praised for so much virtue of this brother! In the desert, confined to my cell, without seeing the world or dealing with anyone, I have to work very hard, and I can barely maintain a good heart and the right intentions in everything! But this brother, seeing and dealing with everyone, with his eyes and ears full of scandals and flattery of the world, has already arrived at such perfection!"

How could one examine a priest's conscience, which is to remain



so clear and so strong?!? In the following things: How does he celebrate Mass and the liturgy of the hours? How does he preach? How does he sit for confession? How does he catechize? How does he prepare himself for all these? How does he chase away the temptations of sensuality?

"The Jews mingled among the nations and learned to act as they did; they served their idols which became a snare to them." (*Ps 106:35-36*) This is the fate of the religious who do not flee the world!

(b) To save our reputation: Our affinity with the world makes us lose our reputation, which means we must help people. The people have a very great idea of the priest. The people look up to the priest. From this reputation comes the priest's ascendancy, the value of his words and actions to touch people's lives. Once the people come to know that a priest is not withdrawn (detached, in solitude), they lose all respect for him! There is no ascendancy! His words do not have any impact on them!

What does 'fleeing from the world' consist of? It does not mean the priest should never leave the room or home. What is meant is that the priest loves to be

withdrawn. He loves to stay at home rather than go out of the house. If he goes out, it is for a real and suitable reason. And when he goes out, he takes necessary precautions (time, place, people) to avoid scandal and to edify people with his good behaviour. If possible, he takes a companion to keep him in good and helpful conversation.

The mere presence of a priest who loves to be withdrawn and avoids the noise of the world is already a sermon that makes a great impact. The contrary is also true. That's why one of the Councils said, "In no other way was the dignity of the clerical order more seriously offended than by the excessive familiarity with the laity!"

When in need, the priests who do not flee the world go to whom? They search out a priest who is withdrawn, hidden, and given to solitude, and to him, they turn for his prayers, for his wise counsels, for providing for their souls! They do not search out the priests of their own kind!!!

There may be bad examples! Priests have to choose the good examples to follow. Follow the example of Prophet Samuel. He was young, learning to serve the Lord in the Temple. There were Hophni and Phinehas, who were older and who had authority. But they were bad! Samuel did not imitate their bad example. He lived as if he did not see them. He was devout, given to solitude, and attended to the worship in the Temple and to the service of the Lord. And in this way, he prospered, grew up and was pleasing to the Lord (*1 Sam 2*).

3. The means to flee the world

What should one do to be a priest who is detached from the world? (1) Be eager and love solitude and being hidden from the world. (2) Have friends among priests who love solitude and are withdrawn from the world; preach by their life, sight, demeanour, and speech; and love virtue, order and discipline (*St. Bernard*). (3) Get used to thinking, reflecting, and meditating. All the disorders in priests and lay people arise because they do not think. (4) Keep busy, praying, and studying. Do not be idle. An idle priest is like a ship without a rudder and anchor in the open sea. The wind will carry it away.

