



★ SALESIAN SPIRIT – ST. CAFASSO'S CONFRENCES – 5
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Introduction

The priest has at his disposal the most powerful means of solitude and prayer to live his calling as one who is consecrated entirely to the Lord.

The Gospels say that Jesus, the head and master of all priests, withdrew into solitude and prayed whenever he could find a moment. So, withdrawing into solitude and praying are the two wings that lift the priest and make him a 'God on earth', teaching him to converse with God. Withdrawing and praying are inseparable qualities: one leads to another; one who withdraws into solitude is a lover of prayer. Withdrawing and praying are the two virtues needed for being a holy priest. It is impossible that the priest who withdraws and prays would also be not detached from the world, be not filled with the Spirit of the Lord, be not meditating, be not a lover of work, etc.

Let us see what prayer is: It is a flight of our hearts to the gates of heaven and a raising of our minds to God.

1. Priest should necessarily pray

The first priests, the apostles, prayed. The priests of all centuries prayed. Good priests pray. Therefore, it is legitimate that we also pray. Actually, the priest finds himself in a greater need of praying, in addition to the general reasons that oblige all to pray: (1) He has to pray by his office; (2) He has to be a master and a teacher of prayer.

The first duty of the priest is to pray (Heb 5:1). The priest's role is to represent people before God and represent God before the people. The Fathers of the Church are unanimous in saying that the priest should pray assiduously day and night for the people and that he has to become an embodiment of prayer. V. P. Avila says that one cannot be a priest if he does not have the spirit of prayer. Before ordaining any candidate, St. Charles

Cafasso on Praying



would ask him if he had examined himself well on this point, whether he knew what praying meant, the mode of praying, the timing of praying, etc. He would not ordain him if he could not become a man of prayer, although he was gifted with the rarest gifts!

2. Priest's art of prayer

Case 1: A priest says, "Let others pray as much as they want, but I cannot. I do not like that. I do not know what to do in prayer. I can do everything, even the most difficult work, but don't tell me to pray! It is very boring."

What should this priest, the one who has the primary responsibility of praying and teaching others to pray, be

told?! The merit of virtue does not consist in the taste, sweetness, or satisfaction that one feels; it consists in the sincere desire (the will) of the heart when one prays in spite of boredom.

Case 2: The priest does not pray as he ought and as much as he ought. He is a man of work but not a man of prayer. What to tell this priest? If work has to be done, it must be done. And if it is difficult, we must at least do as much as we can! The same applies to the priest regarding praying: whether he likes it or not, whether he enjoys it or not, the priest has to pray. For the priest, the duty of praying is indispensable.

Case 3: A priest says, "If I have to pray, I will pray. But I do not know how to." What poor reasoning is this! The 'master' [guru] does not know! Should not the priest prepare himself to be the master? If not, why become a priest with the duty of teaching others to pray?! St. Augustine says: "Place yourself in front of the Cross, and all that you do is prayer: adoration, admiration, praising, loving, thanking, rejoicing, ... everything is prayer."

3. Priest a 'man of prayer'

A priest says the breviary helps in the choir and helps in liturgical celebrations, processions, and funerals. We cannot deny that all this is prayer. But is it sufficient, or does the priest need more than these? We can distinguish three types of priests.

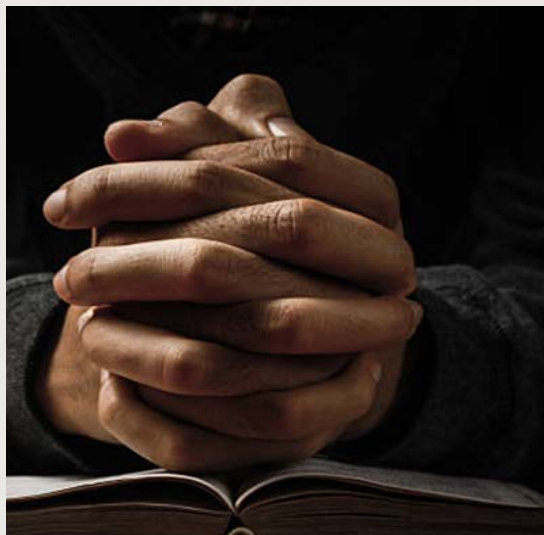
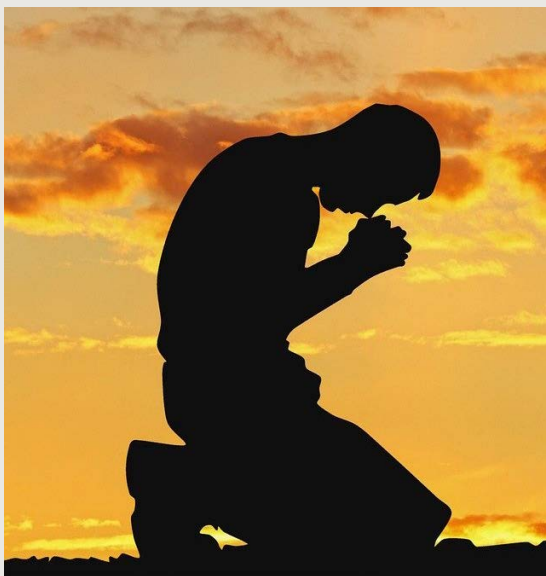
(1) They recite prayers but do not pray. They are voluntarily distracted. They do not care about what they are saying. (2) They pray with sufficient attention. They do only what is strictly necessary! But is it sufficient to be a priest? No! This is not sufficient for a priest who is supposed to be a man of prayer. (3) They are men of prayer. [Just like a man who is wedded to his farm or business or army or job as in the case of a farmer, businessman, soldier, professional respectively] The priest is consecrated to prayer, loves praying, enjoys at least in will, does not know to give it up! He always prays [while studying, working, rejoicing, sleeping, eating] as if always on his knees. He does everything to honour God & glorify Him.

The world will be glad if it finds a man of prayer in every priest.

4. The value of the priest who is a 'man of prayer'

(1) He is a powerful man! He is over and above all men, ... an all-powerful man! E.g. Ex 32:10 reads: "Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them, and of you, I will make a great nation." Who is praying to be left alone? God! The God who does not have anyone on earth or heaven to resist him and who has everything under his command! At this moment, this very God has found a hand more powerful than Him that blocks or stops Him, and He cannot surpass it, so He is forced to exclaim, 'Let me alone! And who is the person so powerful, so great, ... God above God! It is Moses! The Moses who prays, who is a man of prayer, who fights with God and stops him! Indeed, Moses did not have any other weapon, or he could not lay hands on God except through the force of prayer! And Moses won over God! Such cases are seen elsewhere, too: Jacob to the angel, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." (Gen 32:27)

(2) Prayer is more than a manner of command; it is a type of demand, like Joshua's demand, who turned to the Lord and told him frankly, "Stop the day; I need it." Joshua 10:12: "Sun, stand still at Gibeon, and your



moon, in the valley of Aijalon."

The titles given to the man of prayer by the Fathers of the Church flow from here. St. Augustine called the man of prayer the key of heaven! The one who knows how to open is the Lord of everything inside! And he gives the example of Elijah. He prayed, and the heavens were shut! He prayed, and the heavens were opened! (1 Kings 17 & 18) St. John Chrysostom says, "Do not think that it is rare case [Elijah]. It is a general truth: the merit of the saint is shown not only in what he could obtain what he wanted on earth but also in what he could obtain whatever he asked in the heavenly places!" [When he prays, God fulfils whatever is in obedience to God.] Salviano, commenting on Ps 34:15, says, "The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are always open to their cry." It means that the Lord always stays with open ears to the prayers of the just: in this, it is not only hearing but obedience that is implied! God obeys! This shows the great power the man of prayer has before the Lord. Peter Chrysologus commenting on Ex 7:1 [The Lord said to Moses, "See I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet."] asks, "What constituted him God, or what was the quality that made him a God on earth?" He replies, "I do not find anything else other than prayer. Through prayer, he becomes God; for his military triumphs, he commands all elements!" ■