

Treatise on Preaching - Humbert of Romans  
Humbert of Romans  
Fifth Master General of the Order of Preachers  
Translated by the Dominican Students Province of St. Joseph  
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*Dust Jacket Introduction*

The majority of modern books on preaching fall rather easily into one of several categories: collections of sermons, suggested outlines for sermons, or the method of writing sermons. This volume, written by Humbert of Romans, the fifth Master General of the Order of Friars Preachers, is more fundamental. It is concerned with the basic principles and consequently, even though it was written in the thirteenth century, it is timely and applicable today. Humbert treats the main aspects of preaching and displays a happy capacity for combining general principles with minute details. The general tone is lofty with a wealth of quotations from Scripture and the Fathers and the whole is studded with many excellent practical suggestions.

*Text from the 1951 Newman Press edition, Walter Conlon, O.P., editor*

# Editor's Preface

To one who has no close association with the Order of Preachers, the appearance of this volume should give rise to at least one question, namely, who is Humbert of Romans? This is quite understandable since Humbert is almost exclusively a “family” celebrity; his fame rests upon the literary and administrative talents he exercised within and in behalf of the Dominican Order.

His life, though rich in sanctity and solid achievement, was devoid of the spectacular. The exact date of his birth (in the small village of Romans) is unknown, but it was at the end of the twelfth century. He passed his boyhood in peaceful obscurity, and at the University of Paris, instead of the carousing common of students, he applied himself to a life of deep piety, praying much and practicing mortification and almsgiving. He obtained a Master's Degree, and was a member of the faculty of the University when he entered the Order in 1224. His holiness and learning did not go unnoticed; in 1240 he was chosen as Provincial of Tuscany; in 1244 he became Provincial of France and governed wisely until 1254 when he was elected as the fifth Master General of the Order. He held this position until his resignation in 1263. He died in Provence in 1277.

In governing, he demonstrated both indulgence and severity when either was required, and he combined a broad outlook with a genius for detail. Under his rule, the Order flourished in Italy, Germany, Spain, France, and England. Humbert sent missionaries to the Greeks, Hungarians, Saracens, Armenians, Syrians, Ethiopians, and Tartars. He regulated the liturgy of the Divine Office, determined the suffrages of for the dead, commanded the history of the Order be recorded, and even issued minute decrees concerning the election of superiors, the reading of the constitution at meals, the transfer of Friars from one convent to another and other pertinent regulations.

As Master-General, Humbert molded the youthful Dominican Order not

only by his prudent government but also by his writings. The latter were prolific. Humbert authored expositions or commentaries on the Rule of St. Augustine, the Constitutions of the Order, the three Vows of Religion, the Virtues, and the Divine Office. He wrote a life of St. Dominic, a dogmatic and historical account of the General Council of Lyons, and works dealing with the administration of the Order.

This brief sketch of his life and accomplishments should be sufficient to place the author's competence beyond question. Yet, this book is not being published in order to make Humbert better known. It is presented to fill a very definite need. The majority of modern books on preaching fall rather easily into one of several categories, namely, collections of sermons, suggested outlines for sermons, or the method of writing sermons. This volume is more fundamental; it is concerned with the basic principles and, therefore, is in no danger of being outdated or old-fashioned. Humbert treats of the main aspects of preaching, and displays his happy capacity for wedding general principles to minute details. The general tone is lofty with a wealth of quotations from Scripture and the Fathers, and yet the whole is studded with practical suggestions.

The modern preacher faces a world tragically similar to that in which the Church was born. Christian morality indeed governs the actions of millions of individuals but it is pagan materialism that predominates in the social, political, and economic lives of nations. The result is painfully apparent in the uncertainty, insecurity, and the spiritual hunger prevalent today. Christ's Apostles changed the complexion of human society by preaching the Gospel; they modern apostle must go and do likewise. Society must be leavened by faith in Christ, but "...how shall they believe him, of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear, without a preacher?" (Rom. 10:14.)

The present work is an excellent guide to fruitful preaching; may it also serve to enkindle the zeal of those who are chosen not only to offer the *Verbum Dei* on the altar but also to propound the *Verbum Dei* from the pulpit.

# Author's Preface

*Look to the ministry which thou has received in the Lord, that thou fulfill it.*  
– *Col. 4:17.*

Whoever holds an office and does not know his obligations is certain through ignorance to do it badly, as happens to a cantor who is ignorant of the rubrics of the Divine Office.

This is noted in the Book of Kings about the sons of the high priest Heli, who conducted themselves badly in the priesthood, “not knowing the office of the priests to the people” (Kings 2:13).

St. Paul wished the priest who held the office of preacher among the Colossians to be capable. He recommended, as is explained in the sacred text itself, that he make his office of preaching the subject of serious reflection, in order to acquire the qualities necessary to acquit himself worthily. So it is of first importance for a preacher to study carefully and establish precisely what his ministry consists of, and all that relates to it.

In order that all may understand this more easily we shall present the seven following considerations in seven successive chapters.<sup>1</sup>

1. The qualities of this office.
2. The qualities which the preacher charged with this office ought to have.
3. How he ought to enter upon it.
4. The exercise of preaching.
5. The omission or refusal of preaching.
6. The effects which preaching produces.
7. A few points connected with the ministry of preaching.

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<sup>1</sup>The text indicates only six but develops seven. *ed.*

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# Chapter 1

## THE QUALITIES OF PREACHING

First of all it should be noted that the office of preaching is excellent, necessary, and agreeable to God; and it that it is profitable to the preacher himself, and useful to souls; and lastly, that it is very difficult to reach perfection in preaching.

### 1.1 Its Excellence

To understand its excellence we should consider those who have the mission to preach. First their office is apostolic, for in order to fulfill this ministry, Our Lord chose the twelve Apostles and attached them to Himself so that He might send them, at His will, to preach everywhere.

It is also an angelic office as the Apocalypse teaches us, where St. John saw “a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice” (Apoc. 5:2) before the throne of the Lamb. Was it not also an angel who preached to the shepherds of Bethlehem and said to them: “Behold I bring you good news of great joy” (Luke 2:10)? It is little wonder, then, that the angels are similar to preachers, seeing that God “sent (them) for service, for the sake of those who shall inherit salvation” (Heb. 1:14) just as He sends preachers to labor for the salvation of men.

Finally this ministry is divine; for the Son of God became man precisely to hold it: “Let us go,” said He, “into the neighboring villages and town, that there also I may preach, for this is why I have come” (Mark 1:38).

If among the Saints there are none more excellent than the Apostles; if among creatures there is nothing more excellent than the Angels; and if in the universe there is nothing comparable to God, how excellent, then, must that office be which is at the same time apostolic, angelic, and divine?

Further, let us note that Holy Writ which is the foundation of preaching excels other sciences in a threefold way: because of its author, its matter, and the end which it has in view.

1. Its author: human genius, not however without the help of God, discovered for us the other sciences; but this science is directly revealed to us by God himself, for “holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (II Pet. 1:21).
2. Its object: the other sciences treat only of those things which relate to reason, or nature, or to free will; this science, on the other hand, elevates itself to the things of God which infinitely surpass everything else. Also the Divine Wisdom tells us: “Hear, for I speak of great things” (Prov. 8:6). Great things indeed, are the mysteries of the Trinity of God, His Unity, the Incarnation of the Son of God, and other subjects which nothing can surpass in dignity.
3. Its end: the other sciences have only in view either the government of temporal things, as the science of law, or the service of the body, as the science of medicine; or the instruction of the intellect imperfect and enveloped in ignorance, as the speculative sciences, while this science ought to gain for us eternal life. Jesus Christ assured it when he said to the Samaritan woman: “He who drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him shall become in him a fountain of water springing up unto life everlasting” (John 4:13-14). This signifies that the water of Divine Wisdom flows in order to lead us to eternal life, which is no other than God. And this is why we can say that God Himself is the end of this science. Holy Scripture is called Theology (from the two Greek words *theos*, God, and *logos*, word), for this reason, that all its words come from God, speak of God and lead to God. Now it is precisely from these words and not from those taken from other sciences that all good preaching ought principally to come. And since we appreciate a thing by the excellence of its composition, valuing a gold vase more than a lead one, think how much we should value preaching which contains such rare and sublime matter! Also, man



is, according to the philosophers, the highest creature, and composed of body and soul. The soul being by far the more noble, everything which relates to its salvation must be esteemed above that which is of little or no use to man. And it is precisely to the rational man that the preacher addresses himself, for it is thus, says St. Gregory, that we should interpret the words of Jesus Christ to His Apostles: “Preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). By “every creature” is understood man, and man considered according to the soul and not according to the body.

Also when St. Peter preached for the first time he gained close to three thousand souls (Acts 2:41), directing his preaching to the souls of his hearers and thinking only of their eternal salvation. For this reason also, it is written about the great preacher St. John the Baptist: “Thou shall go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, to give to His people knowledge of salvation” (Luke 1:76). And so we see that the excellence of the one for whom we work; thus the service of a king is more excellent than the service of his horses, and the care of his palace is more excellent than the care of his stables. We cannot value preaching too much, for preaching is for man’s benefit, the king of creation; for the salvation of the soul, the more perfect part of man, which is of supreme interest. It can be seen, then, that it surpasses in dignity all the other occupations.

And so, as we have said, whether we consider the excellence of preachers, or the elements which make up their preaching, or the great concerns for which they labor, we shall find everywhere the greatness of their ministry.

## **1.2 Its Necessity**

To know how much preaching is necessary to the world, we should remember that the souls of the Saints in heaven lift their voices before the Lord in never-ending complaint of “those who dwell on the earth” (Apoc. 6:11). This cry, according to the commentators, is directed against those unrepentant men who put off the fullness of the joy of the elect. The elect will enjoy a marvelous supplementary glory when they at last see the ruins caused by the fall of the wicked angels fully repaired, and all the empty places in heaven filled. But there is nothing that will hasten this hour of perfect reparation quicker than the voice of preachers; for they continue what Jesus their model began when

He said: “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 4:17). It is evident that it depends on the preachers to assure the elect the consummation of their heavenly joy.

And just as preaching gains entry for souls into heaven more quickly and more surely, so too it prevents their fall into hell. For thus says the prophet Isaias: “therefore is my people led away captive, because they have not knowledge—therefore hath hell enlarged her mouth without any bounds” (Isai. 5:13-14).

Hence it is that through ignorance so many throw themselves into the abyss; and it is this which keeps preachers from filling the earth with their knowledge; for it is of them, according to the gloss,<sup>1</sup> that we should understand the words of Proverbs: “the lips of the wise shall dispense knowledge” (Prov. 12:7). And so preachers prevent souls from throwing themselves into the abyss, and they deliver “them that are led to death” (Prov. 24:11), on which the gloss adds “by preaching.”

Without preaching, which scatters the word of God like seed, the world would be sterile and produce no fruit. “Except the Lord of hosts,” the prophet Isaias tells us, “had left us seed,” and he understands by this the word of God, “we had been as Sodom” (Isai. 1:9), a land absolutely barren producing no fruit.

On the other hand the demons from the beginning of time have devoted an unbelievable tenacity to the subjection of the whole world, and

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<sup>1</sup>From the beginning of the twelfth century the copies of the Vulgate were usually enriched with two glosses (*ordinaria et interlinearis*); the first were placed on the margin or at the bottom of the pages, the second were placed between the lines. These compilations have today rather a historical than a philological value, and it is difficult to determine just how we should take them, but we should appreciate the service that they have rendered. Even today, the numerous passages from the Fathers of the Church which are found there retain a considerable theological and exegetical value. We cannot but praise and thank these industrious men who esteemed so much the teachings of revelation; less equipped, no doubt, than we in linguistics and paleography, but more advanced, more elevated, more enlightened, and much more profound in all that concerns the Christian way and in the understanding of the Scriptures.

We know that blessed Humbert made great use of them. The same spirit of faith animated him, the same supernatural taste filled his heart. He excelled in nourishing, in enlightening, and in ornamenting his discourses with scriptural sentences, even to the point of repeating these several times in the same argument, applying them in various ways to the subject. The riches of the Scriptures and his piety excuse him, or rather, they justify him. Thus before him, and in another style, the learned and pious St. Bernard wrote.

they have unfortunately subjugated too large a part of it. They would have conquered much more but for the power which God communicated to the preachers and of which it is written: “He gave them power over unclean spirits” (Matt. 10:1), and again, He commanded them to “cast out devils” (Matt. 10:8); this they have done re-enacting according to the interpreters, the exploits of Gideon (Judg. 7) and his soldiers when they put their enemies to flight by means of their trumpets, the beautiful symbols of preachers. Were there no preachers, men would not think of heavenly truths and soon their hearts would become as parched land; “If you withhold the waters, all things shall be dried up” (Job 12:13). St. Gregory explains this as follows: “If someone should suppress the teaching of preachers, the hearts of those in whom eternal hope germinates would quickly dry up.”

Preaching is also indispensable to the infidels; for without it they could not arrive at faith, a necessary condition for salvation. It is for this reason that the Macedonian appeared to St. Paul during the night entreating him to save his people and to come and visit him (Acts 16:9). For he would not have arrived at the faith, if it had not been revealed to him by preaching. “How,” said St. Paul, “are they to believe him whom they have not heard? And how are they to hear if no one preaches?” (Rom. 10:14.) Our Lord gave the gift of tongues to His Disciples so that they would be understood by all, and they might lead to the faith many nations who evidently would not have been converted to Christ without their preaching.

Preaching is the foundation of the Church: “Where was thou,” said Job, “when I laid the foundation of the earth?” (Job 38:4.) These foundations are the Apostles. According to Scripture, God sent them to preach, in order to establish His Church, and on them He erected the edifice that will last until the end of time. The Church, founded without preaching, would not have grown. It is written of Solomon “that he commanded large blocks of choice and precious stones to be placed as the foundation of the temple of Jerusalem” (III Kings 5:17). The gloss explains that those layers of rock and wood which were placed on the foundations are the doctors who came after the Apostles and whose word has brought about the growth of the Church and enriched it with virtues.

The Church, without preaching, would not continue, and the gloss, interpreting the words of Isaias: “I shall glorify the place of my feet” (Isai. 60:14), says that preachers are the feet of the Lord. They carry the weight of the whole Church, which remains erect, thanks to their support, just as the body is supported by the feet.

We can conclude that preaching is truly necessary, for without it the glory of heaven would never be realized, hell would be filled up all too soon, and the world would remain sterile; demons would rule, hearts would have neither hope nor joy in their salvation, nations would not know the Christian faith, and God's Church would have no foundation, growth, or stability.

For this reason St. Paul said: "For you were once darkness, but now you are the light in the Lord" (Eph. 5:8); in fact, in former times deprived of the light which preaching diffuses, men lived in the darkness of ignorance. And just as at the moment of creation, as it is written, "the face of the abyss was covered with darkness" (Gen. 1:2), and then everything was illumined, as soon as light was created, so too men have received by preaching the light which illuminates them. Isaias tells us: "The light has appeared to the eyes of those who dwell in darkness" (Isai. 60:2), and this light, according to the gloss, is the light of preaching. To illuminate the world, then, is the duty of preachers. Our Lord also said of preachers: "You are the light of the world" (Matt. 5:14). "Cursing, lying, homicide, theft and adultery have overflowed the world," says Osee (Osee 4:2), and this deluge would have completely submerged it like that which covered the earth at the time of Noah had not preaching checked its progress. In support of this let us cite an example. Certain clerics alleged to a famous Archbishop that the preaching of the religious who had recently come into the country seemed quite useless to them, since it was obvious that as much usury, fornication, and all kinds of sin continued. But the prelate answered them: "Unfortunately, it is true that many of these crimes are committed; however, these honest men prevent a great many more by their preaching; what would have happened if they had not come to preach? Undoubtedly, all these evils would have increased even to the deluge of the world." It is justly said that preaching restrains the kingdom of evil. Just as "God made a wind blow which dried the land and made the waters diminish" (Gen. 8:1) after the deluge, so also did the Holy Spirit by the breath of the mouth of preachers diminish the floods of sin.

Along the same lines, how many plagues were spared the world through the action of preachers! Often famine has desolated the land, but spiritual famine would be a result more inevitable and fatal were preachers to keep silent. About these words: "There came a grievous famine over the country (Luke 15:14); "Not by bread alone does man live, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4), the gloss says: famine rages mercilessly when the word of life fails. In this word the sick find a universal remedy, for "the multitude of wise men is the health of the world"

(Wisd. 6:26). And the gloss adds that this health is due to the care of preachers. Does it not sometimes happen that cities are abandoned by their inhabitants when a wise government becomes corrupt? “When a people no longer hears the voice of a prophet, it is soon corrupted” (Prov. 29:18); thus, when the preacher is silent, wise men disappear and the majority of men become like animals. On the other hand, the wisdom of those who preach virtue repairs these ruins and leads the people back into the city, as the book of Ecclesiasticus says: “Cities shall be inhabited through the prudence of the rulers” (Ecclus. 10:3), who are, the gloss tells us, the preachers. When the rains of heaven fail, a terrible plague rages, but to be deprived of good doctrine is also a misfortune for humanity; “the needy and the poor seek for waters and there are none, their tongue hath been dry with thirst” (Isai. 41:17). According to the gloss, the devil strives to suppress the sources of doctrine, as “Holofernes commanded that the aqueduct which conducted water to the city of Bethulie be cut” (Judith 7:6), while the Lord sends preachers to distribute these salutary waters, as he had promised, “I will open rivers in the high hills and fountains in the midst of the plains” (Isai. 41:18); that is, according to the gloss, preachers will go and preach the truth alike to the proud and the humble. Finally, if there were no preachers, the world would be like a desert without any roads, where no one could find his way; but they are there, and they point out the way to be followed. For this reason it was said of the famous preacher, John the Baptist, who spoke in the midst of the desert, “Thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways” (Luke 1:76), and again: “To shine on those who sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death, to direct our feet into the way of peace” (Luke 1:79). In conclusion, let us admire the usefulness and the necessity of such an office, since without it the whole world would have remained plunged in the darkness of error; increasing sin would choke out virtue; the most dangerous famine, the famine of the bread of sound doctrine, would ravage the world; sin would deliver up to death innumerable victims; the privation of the saving waters of wisdom would cause an intolerable drought and a desolating dearth of all good; and, lastly, we would not find the way to salvation.

For all these reasons, God, seeing how necessary preaching is, has not ceased since the beginning of the world, and will not cease until the end of time, to send preachers. St. Gregory commenting on the Gospel of St. Matthew tells us: the householder who sends workers into his vineyard at the third, sixth and ninth hours, is a figure of God Who, from the beginning of the

world until the end, does not cease to supply preachers for the faithful.<sup>2</sup>

### 1.3 Its Agreeableness in the Eyes of God

To understand how much the office of preachers is pleasing to God, it is necessary to note that their discourses are like hymns. Nehemias reports that “the singers entered upon the possession of their cities” (II Esd. 7:73) on their return from the Babylonian captivity, and the gloss explains that these singers were those who preached with harmonious and persuasive voices the sweetness of the celestial home. This singing is as pleasing to God as is the playing of musicians to the ears of princes who summon them to their palaces to entertain. And it is to His subject and spouse, the Church, that the Sacred Spouse addresses this invitation: “Let thy voice sound in my ears, for thy voice is sweet” (Cant. 11:14), or in other words as the gloss says: “I wish to hear you preach, for that is very pleasing to me.”

Again, it can be said of preachers that they are the hunters whom Jeremias had in mind when he said: “I shall send them many hunters and they shall hunt them from every mountain and from every hill and out of the holes of rocks” (Jer. 16:16). And rightly do the commentators interpret the words of the sacred text; for preachers, like keen huntsmen, seek sinners of all kinds, souls yet untamed which they wish to offer as a banquet to the Lord. He is as pleased to see this prize on His table as the noblemen of the earth are with a tasty venison. Do we not read in Genesis that Isaac ate with pleasure the kill of Esau? (Gen. 25:28.)

The pleasure that God takes in this hunt for souls is such that He prompts preachers to devote themselves to it, speaking to them as Isaac spoke to his son: “Take thy weapons, thy quiver and bow, and go abroad; and when thou has taken something by hunting, make me savory meat thereof, that I may eat: and my soul may bless thee before God” (Gen 27:3-4).

Notice again that it is precisely from zeal for souls that preaching comes; that is why St. Paul, that great preacher, declared to the Corinthians that for the welfare of their souls he felt himself “urged with a divine emulation” (II Cor. 11:3-4), that is, with a vehement zeal. St. Augustine teaches that no sacrifice is accepted by God as much as zeal for the salvation of souls. If, then, the sacrifice of animals was so pleasing to Him in ancient times, as is written of Noah’s sacrifice: “He breathed its odor as that of the sweetest

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<sup>2</sup>St. Greg., Hom. 19 in S. Matt., Cap 20.

of perfumes” (Gen. 8:21), how much more pleasing should be the offering of souls presented to Him by preachers!

Preachers are also called soldiers of Christ, as St. Paul wrote to Timothy: “Conduct thyself in work as a good soldier of Christ Jesus” (II Tim. 2:3), and the gloss adds “by preaching.” For them, to preach is to fight, for they make war on the errors against faith and morals, which are opposed to the rule of their Sovereign. In this “they are prefigured,” says the gloss, by Dositheus and Sosipater who with Machabaeus were leaders of the army of God’s people (II Mach. 7:19). In fact, their zeal, like that of the Machabees, transformed them into valiant soldiers, capable of doing battle with the agents of error, and worth of having applied to them the words of the Psalms: “The Lord is strong and powerful in battle” (Ps. 23:8). By them is extended the domain of the divine King to whom they subject the people, even those who rebel against His yoke. “The Arabs being overcome besought Judas for peace” (II Mach. 12:11), which means, according to the gloss, that the infidel nations which were vanquished by the truth and the steadfastness of the holy preachers, consented to forswear their errors and embrace the Catholic faith, joining those who confess Christ. It is at the command of Christ that preachers, like faithful warriors, come and go according as they are commanded; and these words of Zachary can justly be applied to them: “I will encompass my house with them that serve me in war, going and returning” (Zach. 9:8), that is, as the gloss says, with those who according to my precept, traverse the world in every direction. It is this, indeed, that preachers do, men truly worthy of being loved and who surely will be loved by their King. Faithful soldiers, they fight His enemies, subject the nations to Him and obey Him generously in all things! If an earthly monarch highly valued such a soldier as David, of whom it is written, that he made a good impression on Achis because he fought successfully in his army (I Kings 29), how much more will the King of heaven esteem the preachers who struggle so valiantly and so fruitfully for His glory?

Those who would please the mighty offer them, on certain anniversary days, whatever they know they like, such as first fruits of their orchard, delicate fish, and such. But the Lord of all things loves souls above all: “O Lord who lovest souls” (Wisd. 11:27). This is the unique present which preachers offer to Him, and He receives with delight. That is why it is said in the psalms: “After her shall virgins be brought to the king”; these young girls represent the souls made innocent by repentance. After this the Psalmist adds: “Her neighbors shall be brought to thee.” This is, says the gloss, what

preachers do, who, preaching in season and out of season, bring back souls to God “with gladness and rejoicing” (Ps. 44:15-16); for it is with the greatest joy in the Church and in heaven that this offering of souls is received.

Furthermore, according to St. Paul, the preacher is a legate sent by God to attend to sacred matters. “For Him I am an ambassador” (Eph. 6:20), says St. Paul. And as an ambassador who has faithfully acquitted himself of his commission earns the favor of his prince, so also the preacher who fills honorably his mission gives pleasure to God. And like a cold rain which comes at harvest time relieving the oppressive heat and refreshing the tired workers, so the faithful legate assures repose to the Prince who sent him.

Preachers are also compared to carpenters, stonecutters, masons and other workers of this kind, for they are charged with constructing in the hearts of men a house exceedingly pleasing to God Who said Himself: “My delights were to be with the children of men” (Prov. 8:31). Workers capable of erecting beautiful palaces are so much desired by princes that they are sought in the most distant countries. Thus in the legend about St. Thomas the Apostle it is recounted that for a similar reason the king of the Indies had him summoned from a very distant place to be his prime minister.<sup>3</sup> Who can doubt that God Himself, seeing preachers eagerly preparing a pleasing abode for Him, takes great pleasure in viewing their activity?

Listen to the text of Job which the gloss applies to preachers. “The children of merchants,” says he, “have not trodden this unexplored land” (Job 28:8). Preachers are happier and more fearless than these merchants; they carry on their spiritual trade throughout the land, exchanging their wisdom for precious acts of faith and numerous good works. In this manner they win souls for God according to the example of St. Paul who, as he says himself, worked unceasingly “to win a greater number of them” (I Cor. 9:21) “by preaching,” adds the gloss. The Lord in His turn exhorts preachers when He says: “Trade till I come” (Luke 19:15). If material gain, of which the parable speaks, was worth of this high praise of the master to his servant: “Well done, good and faithful servant; because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many; enter into the joy of thy master” (Matt. 25:21), how much dearer to God ought to be that business in which He wins spiritual treasures which are souls?

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<sup>3</sup>Undoubtedly allusion is made to these architectural aptitudes when St. Thomas is represented holding in his hand either a ruler or a square or both. He is honored as the patron of stonecutters.



Finally, preachers are the best ministers of God. This is why the Apostles wanted to reserve preaching to themselves. They said, “We will devote ourselves to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4). For, of all the offices whose object is the service of God, none requires so elevated a spirit as that of preaching; preachers ought “to announce His works” (Ps. 63:10) and consequently must have a knowledge of them. To do any job well there is nothing more necessary than intelligence. “A wise servant,” says Proverbs, “is acceptable to the king” (Prov. 14:35), and from this we can conclude how pleasing the office of preaching is to God.

By summing up the preceding we shall understand the pleasure that God takes from holy preaching, which is a most beautiful song, a fruitful hunt, a very agreeable sacrifice, a courageous militia in the service of the prince, an offering which pleases the taste of the great, the faithful execution of a command confided to an ambassador, the construction of a royal palace, a business which increases a householder’s goods, and the wise service of a minister in behalf of his master. And this pleasure is enjoyed not only by the Divine Master, but also by all inhabitants of the heavenly court who, in union with Him, address to the preachers the invitation of the Canticle: “Thou that dwellest in the gardens, the friends hearken; make me hear thy voice” (Cant. 8:13). These friends are, according to the gloss, the angels and the just who reign in heaven with God.

## 1.4 The Benefits Which It Brings to the Preacher; The Office of Preaching

Let us now see what the office of preaching does for the preacher himself.

Note, first of all, that he ought to be supplied with the necessities of this life, as St. Paul has stated, giving many reasons and ending by saying: “So also the Lord directed that those who preach the gospel should have their living from the gospel” (1 Cor. 9:14). Also they should be held in reverence by the people. In other professions man is solicitous for those things necessary for his life; but of preachers it is said: “Therefore do not be anxious saying ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we put on?’; for your Father knows that you need all these things” (Matt. 6:31-32). And while a universal law is imposed on all men “that they eat their bread by the sweat of their brow” (Gen. 3:19), the Lord says that preachers more so than

to the rest of men, “Look at the birds of the air: they do not sow or reap, or gather into barns. . . . See how the lilies of the field grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet, I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory was arrayed like one of these” (Matt. 6:26, 28-29). As if to say, “Since God gives the birds their food, and the lilies their white array and yet they do not work, do not doubt that He will do as much and more for you, who, in His eyes are worth much more.”

It often happens to men overwhelmed with cares and burdened with labor that for the sake of worldly necessities they suffer many vicissitudes. From these words of St. Luke, “Carry neither purse, nor wallet” (Luke 10:4), St. Gregory<sup>4</sup> explains that preachers are justified in putting such a trust in God alone, that, without thinking about providing for themselves, they are assured that nothing will be wanting to them; otherwise, their minds, too preoccupied with temporal things, would be less free to attend to the things of eternal life. Since this truth, that God is charged with providing preachers with temporal necessities (without working for them or being preoccupied about getting them), will not perhaps be readily admitted, our Lord wishing to establish it on the testimony of deeds, before leaving earth, asked His Apostles this question publicly: “Without purse, or wallet, or sandals, did you lack anything?” And they answered, “Nothing” (Luke 22:35-36). This confirms most conclusively the truth under question.

The merit of preachers assures them of innumerable spiritual graces: “He that inebriateth shall be inebriated also himself” (Prov. 11:25), the Book of Proverbs tells us, and the gloss explains it: “Whoever intoxicates his hearers with the wine of divine words, will drink fully of the wine of divine grace.” We read, in the same chapter of Proverbs: “The soul which blesseth shall be made fat” (Prov. 11:25), that is, he who spreads divine grace without, receives within himself an increase of strength. If during the course of his earthly life, he should become stained, he will be cleansed. “Sometimes I purify my feet in milk” (Job 39:6), said holy Job; which signifies, says the gloss, that the feet of preachers are not always free from stains, but are purified in milk; or, in other words, that the dust which they have gathered in the midst of the world will be taken away by the good works which fill them with merit.

God also gives these preachers understanding, for, according to the gloss, they resemble the bird of whom it is written in the book of Job: “Who

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<sup>4</sup>Greg. Hom. Sup. Luc.

gave the cock understanding?" (Job 38:36). Who, if not God, has given it a kind of understanding? For if a cock by reason of its instinct is able to announce the hour of dawn, it is still more fitting that a preacher receive the understanding necessary to announce the hour of salvation.

It is the same with regard to the gift of eloquence. When Moses refused the mission which God wanted to entrust to him, because he was very slow of speech, the Lord answered him: "Who made man's mouth? Did not I? Go, therefore, and I will open thy mouth" (Exod. 4:11-12); whence it clearly follows that it is God's duty to open the mouth of the preacher. Not only does He open his mouth, but He makes the words flow freely: "Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it" (Ps. 80:11). And the significance of this is: I will put there such an abundance of words that you will only have to let them flow out. We have an example of this in St. Sebastian who was in the service of Nicostrate, the husband of Zoe. Sebastian saw a young man descend from heaven and present him with a book from which he had only to read his discourse.

In addition, God gives these words and efficacious power; David said, "The Lord will give to his voice the voice of power" (Ps. 67:34), and since the preacher is the mouth of God, He will not fail to give power to those words which are preached in His name.

The Holy Spirit, the author of all good, distributes to each preacher many other graces, generously to some, less generously to others. That is the reason why it is written: "The Lord will give the word to them that preach good tidings with great power" (Ps. 68:12).

Preachers are likened to "the heavens" because, just as the heavens are adorned with many stars, so are they enriched with many virtues. Job, using the same comparison, says, "His spirit hath adorned the heavens" (Job 26:13); for these ornaments, according to St. Gregory, are the gifts which He gives to the ministers of the gospel and which St. Paul enumerates in these terms: "To one through the Spirit is given the utterance of wisdom, to another, the utterance of knowledge, according to the same Spirit; to another faith, in the same Spirit; to another, the gift of healing in the one Spirit; to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another the distinguishing of spirits; to another various kinds of tongues; to another, interpretation of tongues" (I Cor. 12:8-10). But it is fitting that these graces be dispensed more abundantly to those preachers who labor especially for the welfare of the Church; for God distributes His graces to each one, not only for his own personal needs, but also for the advantage of others. Thus

it is that the Apostle says: “Now the manifestation of the Spirit is given to everyone for profit” (I Cor. 7:7). Upon which the gloss justly remarks that if the gifts of grace are granted to increase the personal merit of certain individuals, then they are also given with a view of the common good of the Church. This being the case, with how much greater abundance will not these spiritual gifts be bestowed by God upon holy preaching? Sometimes, as a matter of fact, the pious exposition of the truths of God rouses the fervor of the people and actually causes them to burst forth into words of praise and blessing, much in the manner spoken of in Proverbs: “He that hideth up corn (i.e., according to the gloss, apostolic preaching), shall be cursed among the people; but a blessing upon the head of them that sell” (Prov. 11:26). We find a vivid example of what we mean in the woman in the Gospel account who, hearing the words of Christ cried out: “Blessed is the woman that bore Thee, and the breasts that nursed Thee” (Luke 11:27).

In other instances this inspired exclamation of which we speak may take the form of a prayer. For example, the story is told about a certain nobleman who, for many years, was preoccupied with the distracting and empty pursuits of the world but, by listening to a preacher, was eventually brought to consider the things of God, to probe into the workings of his soul, and to occupy himself now with his eternal salvation. And when it came his time to die, this thankful man, thinking of how much he owed his director for his conversion, raised his heart to God and prayed: “I beseech You, oh my Saviour, be kind to him who has taught me to know You.” There is no doubt that many other listeners devoutly pray in a like manner for those who preach to them, especially when the harbingers of God’s Kingdom are in the habit of beseeching this prayerful remembrance either at the beginning or at the end of their sermons; a custom which St. Paul rarely failed to observe.<sup>5</sup> They can reasonably expect tremendous graces from such prayers, especially when many are united in the same intention, for Christ Himself said that no prayer uttered by several of the Faithful joined in a common plea would go unanswered (Matt. 18:19).

Often, moreover, the devotion which a preacher inspires causes the people to follow him in order to hear him propound the teachings of Christ, a fact which we ourselves have sometimes witnessed. Again one can turn to the Gospels for confirmation of this; for when Jesus preached, the people, assembling from various sectors, followed Him closely, even into the desert.

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<sup>5</sup>Eph. 7; Col. 4; Thess. 3.

And not only did the anxious hearers accompany Him, they also ministered to Him, as St. Mark notes.<sup>6</sup> This respect and this keen interest extended, after His departure, to His Apostles and disciples: “You did not reject or despise me; but you received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus” (Gal. 4:14), wrote the zealous St. Paul to the Galatians. There is nothing astonishing about this love for God’s preachers: “Let the presbyters who rule be held worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and in teaching” (I Tim. 5:17). Their renown steadily increases and, like Judas Machabee, whose fame spread even to the ends of the world (I Mach. 3:9), their names, too, gradually become universally known. In short, “their sound hath gone forth into all the earth” (Ps. 18:5); their preaching gains for them the admiration of mankind.

All those who put into practice the instructions they receive from the ministers of the Gospel cannot fail to recognize that they thereby become the children in Jesus Christ of these same preachers. “For in Christ Jesus, through the gospel, did I beget you” (I Cor. 4:15) was the way the Apostle expressed it to the Corinthians. This feeling of filial piety ought to be most precious in the eyes of the preacher; for it is meet that he be frequently blessed, served, honored, and esteemed by so many worthy sons in Our Lord Jesus Christ.

There is assured to the sincere preacher, then, a threefold benefit. He is provided with whatever is necessary for his earthly existence; he acquires numerous spiritual benefits; and he gains the devotion of the people.

But over and above these blessings which provide only for the present life there are many other more valuable benefits which concern the future happiness of the preacher: Firstly, he has the firmest certitude about his salvation, for the Saviour shows mercy to men according as they themselves have shown compassion to others, as is explained by St. Luke’s words: “Forgive and you shall be forgiven; give, and it shall be given to you” (Luke 6:37-38). It is no vain hope to expect that one who has saved others by his words will himself likewise be received into heaven, for we have the evidence of Jeremias in this matter.<sup>7</sup> Secondly, he shall receive a very great reward. In fact, it is more than likely that the charity which he practices, not only to advance in virtue himself but also to lead others, increases more and more in him by its very exercise; and everyone knows that upon this progress depends the degree of

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<sup>6</sup> “Sequebantur eum et ministrabant ei” (Mark 15:41).

<sup>7</sup> “Si converteris convertam te” (Jer. 15:19).

eternal reward that awaits every soul. With this thought the Bridegroom of the canticle concerns Himself when He promises: “Two hundred pieces of gold for them that keep the fruit of the vine” (Cant. 8:12), which is interpreted by the gloss as referring to the teachers of the people. Hence, a double recompense belongs to these leaders, for they have worked doubly in saving themselves and in leading others to Christ. Thirdly, besides rejoicing in that which is common to every eternal reward, the preacher shall have an accidental increase in glory from the joy found in those he has saved. “So that you may know,” wrote St. Paul to the Ephesians, “what is the exceeding greatness of His power towards us” (Eph. 1:19)—words which show, observes the gloss, that the most renowned teachers shall receive a special glory added to that which is promised to all. And this glory, according to the interpretation of leading scholars, is an accidental glory added to the substantial glory. But if such be the case for the great doctors because they are teachers, then one is forced to admit a like reward for others who also have been, in every sense of the word, teachers, and who shall receive an increase in glory which will be measured by their individual merit. Consequently, every preacher shall be entitled, in a certain degree, to this increase. There are several reasons for saying this, among which are the following: the gloss says of the text cited above, that the Apostles shall be clothed with a particular brilliance and that this supernatural glory shall clearly correspond to the splendor which surrounded them when they were the lights of the world. Now, since every worthy preacher is a light, for it is of such that we read: “Thy lightnings enlightened the world” (Ps. 66:19), there is no doubt that they will shine with the same brilliance in their eternal home: “They who instruct many to justice, shall shine as stars for all eternity” (Dan. 12:3). Add to these persuasions the assurance of the Gospel that it is better to do and to teach than merely to do, and it becomes increasingly clear that, if each one is to be rewarded according to his merits, justice demands that there be a double compensation on judgment day for those who have performed the double task of doing and teaching. Our Lord indicated this in the words which St. Matthew has recorded: “Whoever carries them [commandments] out and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:9). Just as one notes different ranks of honor at the court of an earthly prince, some being in nobler places than others, so we shall see preachers assigned, not to the lowest, but to the highest places in the heavenly kingdom.

St. John, speaking of this matter of reward, notes: “When He appears we shall be like to Him” (I John 3:2). The glory of the elect, therefore, shall

depend on the glory of God and, the more perfect is their resemblance to the Creator, the more brilliant shall their glory be. Applying this norm to preachers we see that they resemble Christ by the perfect use of their rational faculties; and in addition, in the opinion of many writers, the ministers of God are worth of the glory which Exodus (Exod. 25:25) and the gloss attribute to martyrs and to virgins; for they resemble virgins by the perfect use of their concupiscible faculty and martyrs in the exercise of their irascible faculty. These three points of resemblance are for preachers so many pledges of their future elevation to singular honor in the company of the Blessed.

Another dignity for preachers is the fact that they engage in battle the serpent of old: "Michael and his angels battled with the dragon" (Apoc. 12:7). Preachers form part of the militia of angels, who, under command of St. Michael, wage war against Satan and the legions of Hell. And if David, for fighting against Goliath, rose so high in glory that the people sang his praises upon his return from the remarkable conquest of the giant,<sup>8</sup> what glory must await the preacher when he enters paradise, having battled with such courage against enemies so much more formidable.

In the eyes of men, another source of additional glory is to be elevated above all others in a large assembly, either by precedence or in any other way. "Thou shalt have authority over ten towns," Christ said to the good and faithful servant (Luke 19:17). By "towns," according to the gloss, is meant the souls that have been converted with the aid of preaching of the Divine Word as contained in the Gospels; and God shall justly raise in glory him who has worthily implanted in the hearts of others the treasures of His Divine Word.

Glory and honor are equally assured to anyone who presents himself at the court of a king with a large and dignified retinue, and the good preacher assuredly has this advantage because he does not present himself alone and unescorted to the King of Heaven; rather, he is accompanied by all whom he has saved. With this very thought in mind the learned St. Gregory declared: "Then Peter shall appear with converted Judea, which he leads; then Paul leading, so to speak, the whole world which he converted; then Andrew with Achaia, John with Asia, Thomas with India; in short, there shall be all the shepherds of the flock of Christ like rams who bring behind them the docile flock."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>I Kings 18:7.

<sup>9</sup>S. Greg. In Homilia "Designavit."

Finally, to be presented and crowned with a diadem before princes and people is, undeniably, a rare honor; yet, this is what awaits the preacher who has worthily performed his duties: “Come,” it is written, “you shall be crowned from the top of Amana, from the top of Sanir and Hermon. . .” (Cant. 4:8). The meaning of these words, according to the gloss, is: Whenever preachers make outstanding conversions, their future crown is further embellished because of the many struggles they have endured in carrying on their work. This explains what St. Paul meant when he wrote to the Thessalonians: “What is our crown of glory, if not you before our Lord Jesus Christ . . . ?” (I Thess. 2:19.)

From all that has been said, it is clear that a particular glory belongs to the preacher. And this results from the fullness of his charity, from the sublimity of his office, from his likeness to Christ Himself, from his resistance to the devil, and from the brilliance of the diadem with which he shall be crowned.

This includes the reward for his labors in the present as well as that which awaits him in the future. In order to confirm this conclusion, recall the significance of these words from the Book of Ecclesiasticus: “The lips of many shall bless him that is liberal in his bread” (Ecclus. 31:28). That is to say, according to the gloss: the faithful dispenser of the bread, which is the word of God, shall be blessed in the present life and in the life to come: hence, the spreading of spiritual benefits is a precious assurance of Divine blessings.

## 1.5 Benefits of Preaching for Mankind

We shall now consider the benefits that preaching brings to all men. Having already shown how necessary preaching is in general for the whole world, we now feel that it is worth while to explain its advantages to the individual—a task that embraces as many diverse forms as the varied instructions offered to us by God’s preachers.

For some, the soul only resides in the body as the dead in the tombs and, just as God shall cause the resurrection of the body on the last day by the power of His word, so at the present time the soul is restored to life by the power of preaching. St. John himself wrote: “The hour is coming, and now is here, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear shall live” (John 5:25).



Moreover, there are many who, of themselves, are not able to preserve their spiritual life and must rely on the efficacy of the word of God to sustain them: “Not by bread alone does man live, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4). Like the poverty-stricken, deprived of the means of life and managing to live only by begging, these spiritually poor must seek out preachers in order to hear the tidings of Christ which, if humbly received, will vivify them.

Some avidly desire choice foods; but there is nothing sweeter, provided one has not a depraved taste, than the words of the Master. Listen to the Psalmist: “How sweet are thy words to my palate, more than honey to my mouth” (Ps. 68:103).

Again, there are many who complain about their ignorance of numerous things. Preaching enlightens them and reveals all that God has taught by His Word. To refer to the Psalms once more, “The declaration of thy words giveth light; and giveth understanding to little ones” (Ps. 118:130).

Preaching can likewise be said to exert a powerful influence upon those who, because of their simplicity, do not understand anything of the spiritual order and who lead a purely animal existence. Our Lord intended His words so to act upon men when He said: “The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life” (John 6:64).

To yet another group, which remains groping in the dark and is incapable of following the road that leads to salvation, the penetrating character of preaching serves as a light, whose brilliance shines forth in the middle of the night and points out the way for the searchers of truth. The saintly King David recognized such enlightenment when he exclaimed: “Thy word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my paths” (Ps. 118:105).

There are some who are physically sick and who need certain remedies. But it is an evident fact that human remedies, though undoubtedly effective in certain diseases, have no power whatsoever when used for other diseases. The same cannot be said about the word of God, since its healing power extends to all maladies as the Book of Wisdom observes: “Your Word, oh Lord, is all powerful, which heals all things” (Wisd. 16:12).

Neither is the Divine Word repelled by, nor helpless against, those whose hearts have become hard and rock-like. Inspired preaching can shatter them with the sureness of a hammer: “Are not my words as the force of a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?” (Jer. 23:29.)

Then there are others who feel depressed because they have neither piety, nor compunction, nor devotion, such as the Psalmist portrayed when he

lamented: “My soul is as earth without water unto thee” (Ps. 142:6). They need not despair, for through the diffusion of the heavenly word they are softened and refreshed, and can truthfully say with the psalmist: “He shall send forth his word and shall melt them” (Ps. 147:18).

Among a large number of the Faithful, charity has become weak and ineffective, but, when brought into closer contact with the doctrine of Christ, strong love flames up anew. “Are not my words as fire, saith the Lord?” (Jer. 23:29.)

To the weak-hearted who, like a sterile woman, can never conceive a good resolution, preaching serves as an inspiration and succeeds in making them spiritually fruitful: “The seed is the word of God” (Luke 8:11). Moreover, such a seed performs a double task; it conceives and it actually produces fruit. This is what Isaias meant when he said: “And as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and return no more thither, but soak the earth, and water it, and make it to spring, and give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater, so shall be my word which shall go forth from my mouth” (Isai. 55:10-11).

In much the same way, this word can be compared to a rich wine, and very different from a light wine which is incapable of causing intoxication. One need only recall the example of the saints. They drank deeply of God’s word and were overcome by it to the extent that they forgot the things of this world and became insensible to the blows showered upon them. To quote the Prophet Jeremias: “I am become as a drunken man, and as a man full of wine, at the presence of the Lord, and at the presence of His holy words” (Jer. 23:9).

Consider, further, the many unfortunates whose spirit is so dominated by the flesh that they are really slaves of their passions. Detachment is the precious boon that God’s minister of the word brings to these enslaved souls—a detachment about which St. Paul writes: “For the word of God is living and efficient, and keener than any two-edged sword, and extending even to the division of soul and spirit” (Heb. 4:12), which is to say that the flesh and spirit in man are separated by the power of preaching.

For souls afflicted by temptations and in need of a strong defense, the word of God offers a sure means of protection. The saviour Himself proved this when He put His tempter to flight by recalling phrases taken from the Holy Book. It is also attested by St. Paul: “And the sword of the spirit is the word of God” (Eph. 6:17).

Or, one can regard the word of God as a potent cleansing agent whose function is to remove all stains and at the same time to purify. Jesus told

His Apostles: “You are already clean because of the word that I have spoken to you” (John 15:3). An example taken from the lives of the Fathers of the Desert deals with this point. They had a soiled basket which was plunged several times into water, becoming cleaner and cleaner, and yet did not retain one drop of the water.

How far from sanctity have been so many men! And now they are sanctified by the inspiration of preaching, just as the Saviour wished when He prayed: “Sanctify them in Truth. Thy word is Truth” (John 17:17).

As in the time of the early Church, the Divine Word today communicates grace, for without grace man could not survive the trials of the present life. And that preaching does diffuse grace is shown from the Book of Proverbs: “Good doctrine shall give grace” (Prov. 13:15).

Finally, recall how many souls, weakened by serious sin, have been in danger of death and have been saved by the power of God! “He sent his word and healed them; and delivered them from their destruction” (Ps. 106:20) is the acknowledgement of the Psalmist. As the word of a doctor saves the body, the word of God saves the soul. St. James advises: “With meekness receive the ingrafted word, which is able to save your souls” (Jas. 1:21).

The above mentioned benefits are by no means a complete list of the useful effects of preaching on the individual. And, since we cannot enumerate all the advantages in this work, we shall sum up with the phrase: “The word of God abounds in power” (Eccles. 8:4). Indeed, that word, with its countless good effects, should be cherished as a precious gem of unsurpassed value.

## 1.6 Difficulties of the Office of Preacher

We shall now consider the peculiar difficulties of preaching, and we shall show, by three proofs, that it is not an easy task to proclaim the word of God successfully.

The first proof is found in the rarity of good preachers. In the early days of the Church a small number of Apostles, trained for their particular mission, was enough to convert the entire world; but present day preachers, in spite of their number, make only mediocre gains. *Why?* Because the first preachers were equal to their mission, whereas those following in their footsteps are not. For, to judge the difficulty of an art, one need only count the number of workers engaged in it then note how few there are who really attain perfection in it.

Secondly, the inefficiency of many in carrying out the ministry. All have seen, and, indeed, still frequently see, very learned priests who, in spite of serious application to the task, have never been able to attain success in preaching. But this, too, bears out our conviction that preaching is not easy, since another proof of the difficulty of an art is the inability of those to master it who are evidently skilled in other fields.

The last proof is the necessity of external help which is required for worthwhile preaching. It is a fact that, by possessing one habit, which results from the repetition of an act, we, at the same time, acquire a certain ease in other arts, according to the popular maxim: "It is by forging that one becomes a blacksmith," or, to use another, it is by repeated playing on his instrument that a harpist becomes master of it. But the gift of a preacher is quite different. His virtue is a special gift which only God can grant: "The power of the earth is in the hand of God" (Ecclus. 10:4), by which is meant, according to the gloss, the power of the preacher. This is a sound observation because the power of God alone can communicate to man the ability to preach the Divine Mysteries fruitfully. And this is a further confirmation of our original statement, for that which cannot be acquired by one's own work, but must be received from another, is definitely the rarest and most difficult of possessions.

What, then, are some of the reasons why this phase of the ministry is so hard to master?

In the first place, one can easily find teachers for any other subject, but for preaching there is only one, the Holy Spirit, Whose grace very few receive abundantly. That is the reason why Christ did not want the Apostles, who were to become excellent preachers, to begin the conversion of the world before the Holy Ghost descended upon them and taught them all things. Having received this gift, however, they "... began to speak in foreign tongues, even as the Holy Ghost prompted them to speak" (Acts 2:4).

Another reason has to do with the instrument of the ministry, i.e., language, which can easily lead one astray (even in the simple Christian life), when God does not direct it. The Book of Proverbs wisely informs us: "It is the part of the Lord to govern the tongue" (Prov. 16:1). Just as it is more awkward to help ourselves with the left hand, which easily entangles us, than with the more competent right hand, so the language used in the arduous task of preaching is more liable to failure than when the same speech is employed for our ordinary duties.

The third reason takes up the conditions needed for good preaching. They

are numerous and will be seen more clearly in the following chapter. It is evident that any work is more arduous according as it demands the concurrence of many conditions. For example, a painter has more trouble in producing a sketch than in painting one that needs just a few shades. Thus, by this principle, we find many difficulties in preaching because of the great number of qualifications it demands.

Notice, also, that we praise a person who does something only on the condition that he do it well: “learn to do well” (Isai. 1:17), urges Isaias. This is not easy when it is a question of preaching.

Hence, the preacher must strive with all his might to do justice to such a difficult and perfect ministry. Three things will contribute to his success: application to his work; a knowledge of the method used by other preachers; prayer addressed to God.

About the first point, observe that, granted the grace of preaching well is a special gift of God, nevertheless it demands from the preacher full application to the study of whatever is needed for the proper execution of his office. That is why the gloss insists that every preacher, in imitation of the Apostles, should realize what was meant in Heaven when “. . . the seven angels, who had the seven trumpets, prepared themselves to sound the trumpet” (Apoc. 8:6). And in another place the gloss declares that the words of Christ to His Apostles: “. . . be not anxious how or what you are to speak” (Matt. 10:19) refer only to those chosen ones, in virtue of the privilege of their special vocation so that those who are not so privileged must prepare themselves. Moreover, St. Jerome, while explaining the text of the Prophet, Ezechiel, “Eat this book” (Ezech. 3:1), points out that the preacher must nourish his heart with the words of God and must meditate attentively on them before delivering them to the people.

Some preachers use too many subtleties in their discourse for the sake of elegance. At one time they seek those novelties which the Athenians delighted in; at another time they produce arguments drawn from philosophy which, they imagine, improve their speech. On the contrary, good preachers study principally what is useful and, building their sermons on this, they exclude what is less profitable. St. Paul did that, and so he could say, “You know from the first day that I came into Asia how I have kept back nothing that was profitable to you” (Acts 20:18,20).

Many preachers have a predilection for words, repeating beyond measure, now the parts of the sermon, again the distinctions or the authorities; giving reasons or examples, or words that express one and the same thing, repeating

continually; at all times being far too prolix. These are some of the defects which vitiate a discourse, and they must be avoided. For if a moderate rain makes crops grow well, an extremely heavy rain will flood the field; and, as in the Divine Office, brevity fosters devotion, while a long office engenders sleepiness, so too, preaching, when it is succinct, is useful; when prolonged to excess it becomes useless and tiresome. Also, a good preacher, if he is prudent, will see to it that he does not say many things, and will say them in few words; and if he observes that he has prepared too much matter, he will lay aside whatever is irrelevant, and give to his starved audience bread, a necessary and substantial food, which will be beneficial to them. He also imitates the wise steward whom St. Luke (Luke 12:42) represents to us, and who prudently sees to it that he does not use up at one time all the wheat that he can dispose of.

Other preachers, to support their teaching, use exclusively examples or arguments, or authority; but to combine three is far better, for, where one fails, another will succeed. The combination will form “a threefold cord,” with a fishhook attached, and which “is not easily broken by the fish” (Eccles. 4:12).

In conclusion we shall say that every good preacher, in the composition of a sermon, should first be practical, like a host who prepares food of good quality for his guests. Secondly, he should use moderation, even in practical things; for everything found in a grocery store cannot be used by a host. And thirdly, he should use words which are convincing, just as at a banquet guests are served not only food of good quality, but also food that is well prepared and pleasing to the palate.

There are other kinds of preachers who diligently look for arguments irrelevant to their subject, like the one who preaches on the Apostles Peter and Paul, and borrows from the Book of Numbers the text, “The sons of Merari; Moholi and Musi” (Num. 3:20). One can scarcely adapt this to this subject such incongruous references, for in trying to reconcile them, the preacher runs the risk of exciting derision rather than producing edification.

Some give too much attention to the feast of the day, so that, in order to adapt their discourse to it, they become unpractical and quickly lose the interest of their audience. They deserve the name of choristers of the church rather than priests of Jesus Christ. The choristers often seek only what is proper to the occasion or feast being celebrated, without considering whether the words they are singing are profitable to those present or not.

Others choose a subject which contains only one idea; they are like those

hosts who serve only one dish at table.

It is true, however, that there are preachers who have abundant matter, but they are afraid to omit the least detail, useful or not, dragging out their sermons indefinitely. They are like the host who serves his guests generously with beef, excluding all other dishes; serving for the first course the horns; for the second, the hide; for the third, the hoofs, and so on. That certainly is not the technique of a good cook or host; on the contrary, he removes the less suitable parts, carefully preparing and serving the best.

There are other preachers who start with a subject that is really suitable but they become so attached to the first or second point that they do not develop the others. They are like rustic hosts who serve so much in the first course that the appetite is lost for the following courses, even though the latter are better. Such is not the practice of the cultured, who prepare a sufficient number of dishes and serve a little of each. This is more pleasing to the guests.

Let preachers avoid, then, these abuses in the choice of a subject, and let them be very careful to treat it in such a way that it will be most profitable to those who hear it; they should not limit themselves to one idea, nor choose too extensive a topic, nor dwell too long on the less important points, which should be passed over lightly.

Let them watch lest they fall into the mistake of those preachers who, although they are incapable of composing good sermons themselves, are yet unwilling to study those composed by others, and preach only those that they have laboriously written out themselves. They are like those who serve their guests only bread made by themselves even though they cannot bake. Our Lord told the Apostles to serve the crowd which followed Him into the desert, not the bread that they had made, but that which others had made (Matt. 15). On this subject they tell of a remarkable characteristic of Pope Innocent III, a man of great merit, under whom the Lateran Council was held. While preaching on the feast of St. Madeleine, he had someone read the homily of St. Gregory on the feast while he explained it in the vulgar tongue; and when his memory failed he followed the text of the one reading the book. After the sermon they asked him why he acted thus, when he was so capable of saying original things; he answered that he wanted to confound and instruct those who despise using the works of other people.

There are some who depend on their own knowledge, relying only on themselves and neglecting to consult the interpretations of the Sacred Scriptures made by the Saints. St. Jerome speaks of these when writing to

St. Paulin: “They have no desire to find out what the Prophets and Apostles meant, but adapt inapplicable texts to their ideas, applying the words of Scripture to statements that are opposed. Their own words to them have the authority of God.”

Others there are who are more interested in the form of their discourses than in the matter. They are like a host who is more concerned with the beauty of a dish in which food is served than the food itself. They ought to meditate on what St. Augustine said in his Confessions, “I know that wisdom and folly resemble food, some of which is wholesome and some harmful. And just as they can be served in worthless or precious plates, so also good can be presented as evil in flowery discourse or in discourses lacking all elegance.”

A preacher who wishes to avoid the three errors that we have just pointed out, will take great care to study what others have taught about the Scriptures, in order to find his inspiration in the holy Doctors rather than in himself, and in his discourse he will prefer practical thoughts to beautiful words.

In regard to the second point, note that the arts are taught much more efficiently by example than by oral teaching. For one does not learn to play the hand-organ so well by verbal instruction as by seeing and hearing another play. Likewise it is very important in learning to preach well, to study not only the different methods used by great preachers, but also those adopted by others; in order to avoid the errors of the latter and to imitate as far as possible the excellences of the former. That is why Gideon, who was the prefigurement of a good preacher, said to his soldiers, “What you shall see me do, do you the same” (Judg. 7:17).

As to the third point we must observe that every effort of man is worthless without the assistance of God: a preacher, therefore, who wishes to benefit his listeners, ought to have recourse above all to prayer. This is what St. Augustine says, “If Queen Esther, before setting out to Assurius to implore salvation for the Hebrew people, begged God to inspire her with words capable of obtaining this favor, how much more ought that one to pray, who wishes to procure eternal salvation for men by his doctrine and his discourses!”<sup>10</sup>

To sum up, the preceding considerations point out three difficulties which are met in preaching; three reasons that explain why we meet with these difficulties; and three ways of overcoming them and of acquiring the qualities

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<sup>10</sup>S. Aug., De Doctrina Christi, lib. iv.



indispensable to preaching.

Furthermore, the office of preaching is very different from a considerable number of other offices and greatly excels them. Some of these worldly offices are contemptible, while preaching is an excellent and noble work; their usefulness is slight, while preaching is necessary for the whole world; they displease God and in His eyes have little worth, while preaching is eminently pleasing to Him; they return but little profit to the business-man, while preaching brings to the minister of God considerable benefits; they benefit the rest of men but little, while preaching has the greatest utility for all men; finally, some of these secular offices can be undertaken without great difficulty, while preaching is such a noble art that one cannot fulfill it in an honorable and fruitful manner, without overcoming the most serious difficulties. But how success is to be envied and praised!

## Chapter 2

# THE QUALITIES NECESSARY FOR PREACHING

We shall now consider the necessary qualities of a preacher. Some pertain to his life; others to his knowledge, his language, his merit, or to his person.

### 2.1 The Preacher's life

He ought to live a truly good life. St. Gregory says, "Before preaching the word of God, he must examine his own life." There are certain conditions essential to a good life, and, consequently, these conditions are necessary for a preacher. His life ought to be in harmony with his conscience, for a troubled conscience will prevent him from lifting up his voice fearlessly. St. Gregory rightly says, "No one can have confidence in preaching good doctrine, if his tongue is paralyzed by a bad conscience."

His life ought to be irreproachable; for how can he reproach others with what he himself is guilty of? That is why the Apostle wrote to the Philipians, "Without blemish in the midst of a depraved and perverse generation . . . holding fast the word of life" (Phil. 2:15,16), in order to preach it to others.

His life ought to be as austere as John the Baptist's, the preacher of penitence, or St. Paul's who said, "I chastise my body and bring it into subjection lest perhaps after preaching to others I myself should be rejected" (I Cor. 9:27).

Elevated to a lofty plane by the very nature of the office, the life of God's minister must be without blemish, since his conduct ought to measure up to the dignity of this sacred work. Isaias exhorted this when he wrote: "Get thee up upon a high mountain, thou that bringest good tidings to Sion" (Isai. 40:9).

Notice, however, that it does not suffice that the preacher's conduct be simply inoffensive. His life ought to be a shining light to all men and he should preach to them by word of mouth and, above all, by good example, in the manner described by St. Paul: "... Among these you shine like stars in the world, holding fast the word of life ..." (Phil. 2:15-16). We have noticed in a previous passage that this remark of the Apostle is appropriately applied to those engaged in preaching the Divine Word.

Nor should the preacher's own life be out of harmony with his words. "Do not let your actions betray your words, lest, while you speak to the Faithful, they say within themselves: 'Don't you yourself do the things that you preach?'" is the admonition of St. Jerome.

His life ought to diffuse, round about him, the perfume of good example. He must be like the Apostle, the favorite of Christ, in order to draw others to himself. "The renown of Judas Machabee extended even to the ends of the world" (I Mach. 3:9), declares the sacred text, which the gloss applies to the good preacher, charged with defending God's cause and His law.

## 2.2 Knowledge Required by a Preacher

We must not overlook the high degree of learning that is necessary for preachers, who are commissioned to instruct others. St. Paul justly reproached certain ministers of the word for their deficiency in this respect. Here are some of his words: "... desiring to be teachers of the Law, when they understand neither what they say, nor the things about which they make assertion" (I Tim. 1:7).

This knowledge should be very extensive. First of all, it should include a firm grasp of Holy Scripture, since in that there is substantially contained the doctrines that the preacher is bound to preach. "From the midst of the rocks they shall give forth their voices" (Ps. 103:12), wrote the Psalmist; or to bring out the point, they must draw from the Old and New Testaments as from an inexhaustible quarry, which they evidently cannot do if they do not have the requisite knowledge.

It is a fact worth noting that the Saviour, in choosing unlearned men as preachers, endowed them Himself with a knowledge of the Scriptures; hence, we see in their writing frequent references to the texts of the Old Testament. And St. Jerome adds that learning, which ordinary men seek by study and daily meditation on the Law of God, was granted directly by the Holy Ghost to these chosen disciples. That is why it has been written: “And they shall all be taught of God” (John 6:45).

After the study of the Holy Books, should follow the study of creatures, for the Creator has placed in these many profound lessons. St. Anthony, the hermit, observes that they are like a book, containing many edifying thoughts for those who take the trouble to read. The Redeemer often had recourse to this type of knowledge in His discourses, as, for instance, when He said: “Look at the birds of the air. . . . See how the lilies of the field grow . . . .” (Matt. 6:26-28).

Next there should follow a knowledge of history for this science, dealing with both the faithful and infidels, abounds in examples which furnish the preacher with valuable lessons. Our Lord used this branch of learning when, to confound the blindness of those who despised His words, He said: “The queen of the South will rise up in the judgement with the men of this generation and will condemn them; for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, a greater than Solomon is here” (Luke 11:31). And, for the benefit of those who would not do penance, He added: “The men of Ninive will rise up in the judgement with this generation and will condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonas, and behold, a greater than Jonas is here” (Luke 11:32).

The preacher must also know the laws of the Church for many men are ignorant of them; and it is his duty to instruct these. It was with this intention that St. Paul “. . . traveled through Syria and Cilicia and strengthened the churches, and commanded them to keep the precepts of the Apostles and presbyters” (Acts 15:41).

It is equally necessary that the minister of the word be familiar with the mysteries of religion, upon which subject the Apostle noted: “And if I know all mysteries . . . .” (I Cor. 13:2).<sup>1</sup> Religion is, indeed, full of mysterious figures

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<sup>1</sup>In this passage St. Paul, in order to emphasize the supremacy of charity over all else, discusses the most excellent and most heroic acts: “to distribute one’s goods to the poor, to deliver one’s body to the flames, to know all mysteries, to speak all the tongues of men and of angels”; and he declares that without charity all these wonderful things would be useless. He indirectly affirms by this the merit and worth of these acts, provided they are

and lessons, the recounting of which can be most edifying. Consequently, the preacher should be cognizant of them.

Then there will be applied to him the words: “And in the midst of the Church she shall open his mouth, and she shall fill him with the spirit of wisdom and understanding” (Ecclus. 15:5). The Spirit of understanding spoken of is exactly He Who aids us in penetrating the meaning hidden in words and figures, and “understanding” signifies “to read within” something.

On the other hand, the preacher should not neglect knowledge gained by experience, for those who have attained a wide experience in the care of souls are able to speak more competently about interesting subjects: “A man that hath much experience shall think of many things: and he shall show forth understanding” (Ecclus. 34:9).

In addition the preacher must be able to judge souls, which means that he should: firstly, know those whom he should not preach the word of God, for it is not intended for dogs and swine; secondly, realize when it is convenient to preach and when to keep silence, as “there is a time for speaking, and a time for silence” (Eccles. 3:7); thirdly, preach according to the needs of his hearers, as St. Gregory advises in his Pastoral, where he enumerates thirty-six varied subjects that a preacher may use; fourthly, guard against verbosity, loudness, unbecoming gestures, lack of order in the development of thoughts, and other defects which are disastrous to preaching. Speaking of this subject, St. Gregory explains the words of Ezechiel: “The sole of their foot was like the sole of a calf” (Ezech. 1:7), by noting that the soles of the feet of a saintly preacher resemble those of the calf because of their form and that they symbolize (the sole of the foot being divided in two parts) the proper division of the subject under treatment. Finally, the preacher should be aware that the skill he possesses results from knowledge communicated by the Holy Ghost. This was the type of learning possessed by the Apostles, who grasped all things by the power of the Holy Ghost from Whom the inspiration for all their sermons came, as is observed in the Acts: “They began to speak foreign tongues, even as the Holy Spirit prompted them to speak” (Acts 2:4). Happy are those who are provided with this knowledge which makes up for the imperfections of all other kinds of learning!

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enlivened by charity.

### 2.3    **The Language of the Preacher**

In reference to language, it is essential that the preacher have clear diction, lest a defect of speech make his words unintelligible. Thus Moses, having such a defect, excused himself from accepting the mission which God confided in him; and his brother, Aaron, who was eloquent, was entrusted instead with the task of carrying the word of God to the people. The account in Exodus is as follows: “Aaron the Levite is thy brother, I know that he is eloquent. . . . He shall speak in thy stead to the people and shall be thy mouth; but thou shalt be to him in those things that pertain to God” (Exod. 4:14-16).

Furthermore, it is imperative that God’s representative know the intricacies and the resources of language. If in the primitive Church God gave the gift of tongues to His ministers in order that they might speak to all men indiscriminately, would it not be improper for a preacher to be defective in speech, either because of a weak memory, or an ignorance of Latin, or an inability to express himself well in the vulgar tongue, or any other fault of this kind? The Apocalypse states: “And his voice was like the voice of many waters” (Apoc. 1:15). The preacher is actually the voice of Christ in this world and he ought to have in his words a fullness proportionate to the subjects that he will treat.

It is equally desirable that the preacher have a voice with a definite resonance, otherwise he will lose much of the fruit of his sermons, for the weakness of his voice will prevent his words from being clearly heard. Scripture even compares the voice of a preacher to the sound of trumpets, for it should be heard at a distance with force and clarity. And then it is that we can apply to the preacher the words of the Prophet Osee: “Let there be a trumpet in thy throat. . . .” (Osee 8:1).

In regard to style, it should be so clear that the listener can easily understand, and not be of the type that St. Augustine decries: “Those who cannot be understood without difficulty should never be commissioned to instruct the people; or at least only in rare instances and in cases of urgent necessity.”<sup>2</sup> The Book of Proverbs has practically the same advice: “. . . the learning of the wise is easy” (Prov. 14:6).

The manner of delivery should be neither fast or slow, for the one becomes burdensome and difficult to follow, the other occasions weariness. “A genuine philosopher,” remarked Seneca, “should take as much care of his diction as

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<sup>2</sup>S. Aug., “De Doctrina Christi.”

of his life.”<sup>3</sup> Nothing is in order where haste prevails; therefore the discourse should flow smoothly without tiring or overtaxing the listener. If this is demanded of a philosopher, who merely desires the esteem of men, how much more should it be of a preacher who labors for the salvation of souls!

Also, the delivery should be succinct, according to the advice of Horace: “Be brief in your speech so that the docile may understand and the faithful keep your words.” That is why the Book of Canticles says: “Thy lips are as a scarlet ribbon” (Cant. 4:3)—a reference to preachers who, as the gloss holds, are the lips of the Church. And as a ribbon binds the hair of the head to prevent it from falling into disorder, so the lips of preachers should restrain the profusion of words.

A sermon should be simple, and devoid of all the empty ornaments of rhetoric, after the example of those Asiatic nations who went to battle armed only with a plowshare. “Guard against multiplying the solemn Divine words lest you thereby overburden your speech,” is the advice of St. Augustine.<sup>4</sup> At the same time the Bishop of Hippo describes in detail the metre, the length of syllables, and the oratorical figures which may be properly used. There is nothing astonishing about the fact that a saintly doctor concerned himself with such minor points, when we realize that the philosophers also considered them. Seneca, for example, declared: “Any discourse having Truth for its object should be simple and unaffected.”<sup>5</sup> Leave the ingenious style to art; here it is a question of souls. A sick man does not look for eloquence in his doctor; and a doctor who gives his prescriptions in flowery language is like a ruler who cares more for elegance than practicality.

The preacher should, moreover, exercise prudence, varying his sermons according to the type of his hearer. Let your word, says St. Gregory,<sup>6</sup> be a sweet melody for the good, a rebuke for the wicked; let it encourage the timid and moderate the restless; let it arouse the slothful and stimulate the negligent; let it persuade the obstinate, calm the hot-headed, and finally, let it console those who are losing hope. This is exactly what the text of Isaias teaches, “The Lord hath given me a learned tongue” (Isai. 50:4).

But all of this will be of little use to the preacher if his speech is not pleasant, “for a man without grace is as a vain fable” (Ecclus. 20:21). He should have a graciousness and sweetness of speech like that which was written of

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<sup>3</sup>Seneca, in “Epist.”

<sup>4</sup>S. Aug., “De Doctrina Christi.”

<sup>5</sup>Seneca, in “Epist.”

<sup>6</sup>St. Greg. in *Registr.*, lib. 7.

the Master of all Preachers, “Grace is poured abroad on thy lips” (Ps. 44:3).

## 2.4    **Of the Merit of the Preacher**

Let us observe here that besides the merit attached to every good work, the preacher acquires a considerable increase of merit by acquitting himself worthily in his ministry; for it is written in St. Matthew: “Whoever carries them (the commandments) out and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:19).

But this merit may be lessened or even destroyed by diverse ways: firstly, when a person, for example, preaches without having received a mission for it. “And how are men to preach,” St. Paul asks, “unless they be sent?” (Rom. 10:15.) Secondly, when the preacher is a notorious sinner. “To the sinner God hath said,” and especially to the public sinner, “why dost thou declare my justices and take my covenant in thy mouth?” (Ps. 49:16.) Thirdly, if for any motive whatsoever the preacher swerves from the truth in his speech like those whom Ezechiel censured: “And they violated me among my people for a handful of barley and a piece of bread to kill souls which should not die and to save souls alive which should not live, telling lies to my people who believe lies” (Ezech. 13:19). “It is worth far more,” St. Augustine says, “to be less understandable, less pleasing, less moving, than to say what is not true and what is not just.”<sup>7</sup> Fourthly, when the preacher does not practice what he preaches, and his works are not in accord with his words; for he who exhorts others to lead a good life is obliged to set the example, as the gloss observes of these words from the Book of Proverbs: “Let not mercy and truth leave. Put them around thy neck” (Prov. 3:3). St. Paul speaks likewise in his Epistle to the Romans: “Thou therefore who teachest another, dost thou not teach thyself? Thou who preachest that men should not steal, dost thou steal?” (Rom. 2:21.) Fifthly, when the preacher prefers his own material gain rather than the spiritual profit of his hearers, contrary to the practice of the Apostle<sup>8</sup> who did not seek presents or material goods for himself, but desired only as the fruit of his labor, the souls of those whom he preached to.<sup>9</sup> “Virtuous preachers do not preach,” St. Gregory says, “In order to gain a living, but it is because they preach that they have a right to a livelihood;

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<sup>7</sup>S. Aug., “De Doctrina Christi.”

<sup>8</sup>Phil. 4:17.

<sup>9</sup>II Cor. 12:14.



and when they receive the necessities of life from their hearers, they rejoice in the reward assured to the giver rather than in any personal benefit they themselves receive.”<sup>10</sup> Sixthly, when the preacher seeks his own interests and not God’s, preaching not Jesus Christ but himself, contrary to the teaching of St. Paul.<sup>11</sup> To preach thus, St. Gregory says, for the sake of short-lived praise is to exchange the most precious of treasures for a bauble.<sup>12</sup> Seventhly, when the preacher intends to humiliate his audience rather than show them the good that he wishes them. “Some indeed,” St. Paul says, “preach Christ even out of envy and contentiousness, but some also out of good will” (Phil. 1:15). Or when by the harshness of his words, he gives scandal; for “a placable tongue is a tree of life,” heavy with good fruit, “but that which is immoderate shall crush the spirit” of those who hear it (Prov. 15:4). Eighthly, when, through lack of discernment, the preacher is so opposed to one disorder that he occasions the contrary disorder. He must preach, St. Gregory says, humility to the proud without awaking in the timid a pusillanimous fear; the desirability of goods to the lazy without arousing undue desires in the dissipated; calm to those who are overly active without condoning the torpor of the inactive; patience to the hotheaded without encouraging the carelessness of men already thoughtless and lax; zeal to those who are gentle and patient without provoking the violent to anger; generosity to the avaricious without loosening the reins of the spendthrifts; reason in the lavishness of the extravagant without inspiring in the thrifty an excessive attachment to the goods of the earth; the esteem of their conjugal duty to the married without having the married disregard the object of marriage. In a word, he must preach good works, without seeming to sanction the contrary vices; praise the perfect without discouraging the less perfect, and encourage the latter to advance in virtue and not to be satisfied with their present imperfect state.<sup>13</sup> Ninthly, when the preacher does not prepare himself by works of penance. Is it not shameful and ignominious, says St. Jerome, to preach Jesus, model of the poor and hungry, with a body stuffed with food? To teach the law of fast with an exquisite manner of living, and a mouth gorged with food? If we are successors of the Apostles, let us not content ourselves with imitating their discourse, but let us also imitate their life and their abstinence.<sup>14</sup> Tenthly,

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<sup>10</sup>S. Greg., in *ij Moralibus*.

<sup>11</sup>II Cor. 4:5.

<sup>12</sup>S. Greg., sup. *Ezechiel*.

<sup>13</sup>S. Greg., in *pastoralis*, part. 3

<sup>14</sup>S. Jerome, sup. *Michaeum*.

when the preacher is not inspired with charity: “In vain,” St. Paul says, “do I speak with the tongues of men and angels, if I do not have charity” (I Cor. 13:1). In fact, such a preacher, even if he were useful to others, would be fatal to himself.

To sum up, in order that preaching be of profit to the preacher as well as to his listeners, it is necessary that he does not preach unless he has a mission for preaching; that he be not in a state of open sin, or depart from the truth, or contradict his words with his deeds, or seek temporal rather than spiritual goods, or work for his own interests and not for the glory of God; or discourage or scandalize his listener, or provoke him to sin; or neglect works of penance, or not have charity as his motive for preaching.

## 2.5 The Person of the Preacher

The qualities requisite for a preacher in regard to his person are first of all, that he be of the male sex, for St. Paul “does not want women to be permitted to speak” (I Tim. 2:12). He gives four reasons for this: Firstly, a lack of intelligence, for in this woman is thought to be inferior to man; secondly, her natural state of dependency (the preacher should not occupy an inferior place); thirdly, the concupiscence which her very presence may arouse; fourthly, the remembrance of her first error, which led St. Bernard to say, “She spoke but once and threw the world into disorder.”

Next the preacher must not have an exterior deformity which is offensive to the sight, for as the Lord, in the old law, rejected as ministers those who were deformed,<sup>15</sup> so, too, the Church excludes them from solemn functions because of the derision they might engender and which would scandalize the people.<sup>16</sup>

The preacher must also have sufficient strength for long hours of study, for the expenditure of voice necessary in preaching, for the fatigues of travel, and to put up with the lack of even the necessities of life. For so the Apostles inured themselves to suffering that they might announce the holy word.<sup>17</sup>

They must also be of a suitable age. The Redeemer, says St. Gregory, although in heaven He had the omnipotence of the Creator, and was the teacher of the Angels, yet He did not begin His mission of teaching until He

<sup>15</sup>Lev. 21:17 et seq.

<sup>16</sup>*Corpus iuris*, Dist. IV. *Si Evangelium* 7, q. 1, *Cum percussero*

<sup>17</sup>Ps. 91:3.

was thirty years old. This He did in order to inspire the over eager with a healthy caution, showing them how He Who was sinless did not begin preaching the perfect life until He had reached the perfection of maturity.

The preacher must also be superior to others in his state of life, in literature, in religion, and in other things, unless he only preaches occasionally and that before the learned, in order to exercise his art. From this it follows that the layman, occupying the last place, has not the quality for preaching. “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings and that preacheth peace” (Isai. 52:7). That is to say that the preacher ought to have a certain pre-eminence. And finally, he must not be an object of men’s scorn, lest this scorn fall on his preaching. “He,” St. Gregory says, “whose life merits blame, must expect scorn for his word.”

## 2.6 Some Figures of the Preacher

It has been noted that the Holy Scriptures multiply with a prodigal lavishness figures which represent preachers. The gloss gives this reason for it: it is because preachers must learn well what they ought to do and what fruits they ought to produce, each in his own way, according to the signification of these different similitudes.

“Thou shalt be,” says Jeremias, “as the mouth of the Lord, if thou wilt separate the precious from the vile” (Jer. 15:19). It is exactly this that preachers do: they, then, are the mouth of the Lord. “The light of my countenance,” Job says, “fell not upon the earth” (Job 29:24); which the gloss says, means that the Church does not preach the divine mysteries in all their brightness to earthly men. Thus the preacher, to whom it belongs to make this brightness shine out, is justly called the countenance of the Lord. “I will glorify the place of my feet” (Isai. 60:13), says Isaias, to which the gloss adds that these feet are the preachers. Being then, at once, the voice, the countenance, and the feet of the Lord, every minister of His Word should allow nothing to appear on his face which is not on the face of God; and finally, he should carry God wherever he goes, as the feet carry the body.

Preachers are likened to Angels. “The seven angels prepared themselves to sound the trumpets” (Apoc. 8:6); and according to the gloss, these angels represent the army of preachers. Preachers, then, must take care that there is in them nothing of the devil or of the beast, but on the contrary they must be above the common run of men, like unto Angels.

Preachers are also called, the “eyes, teeth, neck, or breasts of the Church” and such-like things, as are found in the Canticle of Canticles (Cant. 4). To these titles are attached diverse obligations. Preachers are the eyes of the Church, for they watch over souls in His name; they are the teeth for they grind the wicked and make them enter into the bowels of the Church; they are the neck, because they have as their mission, to recount the eternal joys, to maintain the breath of life, and to transmit the bread of sound doctrine; they are the breasts, for they give milk to those who, in Christ, are still little children. Again, as Job puts it, preachers are “heavens.” “The divine Spirit has adorned the heavens” (Job 26:13), that is, has adorned preachers. It behooves them, therefore, to shine forth as the heavens, with the brilliance of their many virtues.

They are “stars” he says at another time: “God shutteth up the stars as it were under a seal” (Job 9:7); preachers according to the gloss ought to illuminate the earth in the night of this world.

They are called the “gates of heaven.” “He had opened the doors of heaven,” says the book of Psalms (Ps. 77:23); and these doors, according to the gloss, are preachers. It belongs to them to open a passageway to heaven, so that men may enter, and also to pass on the graces of heaven in order that they may flow over the face of the earth.

Preachers are also likened to clouds; for like clouds in the sky, they should encompass the whole world; “The clouds,” says Job, “go round about all things” (Job 37:12), as preachers do, says the gloss, when they traverse the world, casting their light upon the very ends of the earth. In the same vein, they are compared to the snow that “God commandeth to go down upon the earth” (Jer. 37:6). In fact, water accumulates in the heavens, the gloss tells us, to form snow, and in falling upon the earth, the snow turns again to water spreading over all the land. In like manner, the “snow” gathered in the sublime hearts of the Saints in contemplation falls upon the earth where it is melted by the charity of the preachers, and in the form of his humble words flows into the hearts of the people.

They are also called the “thunder”—“When the seven thunders,” it is written in the Apocalypse, “spoke out their voices” (Apoc. 10:3). These seven thunders represent preachers, because they ought, according to the gloss, inspire the fear of God. And St. Gregory explains the text of Job; We should hear in thunder the preaching of the fear of God; which shakes the hearts of men.

Someone says that preachers are “precious stones.” “The king com-

manded that they should bring great stones, costly stones, for the foundation of the temple” (III Kings 5:17). And these stones, on which the edifice rests, are the holy doctors, whose preaching edifies the Church and adorns it with virtues.

It is also said that the preachers are “mountains,” because, according to the gloss, the mountains first receive the bounties of heaven, passing them on to the low-lying lands. “Let the mountains receive peace for the people and the hills justice” (Ps. 71:3), is written in the book of Psalms.

Again, preachers are said to be “fountains” because their words flow out like water from a spring. “Thou hast broken up the fountains, O my God” (Ps. 73:15), that is, according to the gloss, you have raised up preachers to pour waters of eternal wisdom.

It is said that they imitate “eagles,” which swoop down on carcasses; and preachers, in much the same way, search from afar the souls dead in sin. “Wheresoever the carcass shall be, the eagle is immediately there” (Job 38:36.) Every holy preacher anxiously hastens to wherever sinners are to be found in order to shed over them the life-giving light, which dispels the darkness of death into which sin has cast them.

Preachers are like the “cock,” whose song announces the dawn: “Who gave the cock understanding?” (Job 38:36.) The gloss explains that the preacher, in the midst of the darkness of the present life, awaits the coming of the light which will rise upon the world, and announces the light by his words, just as the cock announces the day by his song.

And again, they are compared to “ravens,” for in these birds are certain good qualities found in preachers: “Who provideth food for the raven, when her young ones cry to God?” (Job 38:41.) Is not the raven the preacher, whose little ones, the gloss tells us, whose beaks open for nourishment, wail in the bottom of the nest? In order to facilitate his mission God gives the preacher an abundance of grace not only for his own use but also for the nourishment of those placed under his charge.

The preacher is compared to a “dog”: “There are,” according to Isaias, “dumb dogs not able to bark” (Isai. 56:10). To bark is to preach, says the gloss, and the preacher is likened to the dog because he ought to run here and there devouring souls and gathering them into the Church, as it is written in the Book of Psalms, and ordinances. “King Assuerus,” it is written in Esther, “sent letters to all the province of his kingdom” (Esth. 1:22); that is, according to the gloss, God has recourse to the preachers to make known to the world His warnings and reprimands.

They are fearless “companions in arms,” with whom David filled the earth with his exploits. The Lord says in Isaias of these valiant men: “I have called my strong ones in my wrath,” (Isai. 13:3)—St. Paul for example, adds the gloss. The sacred text continues: “The Lord of host hath given charge to the troops of war” (Isai. 13:4), providing them, concludes the gloss, with the armor of the great Apostle, in order to annihilate by their preaching those who oppose the knowledge of God.

Preachers are also “stewards” of the true Solomon, furnishing his table with all that is needed for the banquet. The book of Kings tells us, in fact, “that the governors of Solomon furnished the necessaries for his table, with great care in their time” (III Kings 4:27). And thus by preaching and disseminating the true doctrine, preachers work in harmony in order that nothing be lacking in the house of God, and that His table be abundantly served with whatever may nourish the faithful.

They are equally the “constructors” who under the direction of Esdras raised from its ruins the temple of the living God. It is written in the book of Esdras: “They gave money to hewers of stone and to masons” (I Esd. 3:7)—the gloss understand here preachers who have united with the bonds of charity the hearts of those to whom they have taught the good life, just as the workers joined together with cement the square, polished stones which went into the making of the building.

Preachers are, finally, the vigilant “sentinels” placed in charge of the house of Israel, that is, the Holy Church, in order to warn it of approaching danger. “Son of man, I have made thee a watchman to the house of Israel” (Ezech. 3:17). And the gloss gives this qualification to the preacher, because by his life he ought to elevate himself to the heights and from there mount watch over the salvation of the city of God.

In the preceding it should be noted that the figures, under which preachers are placed and which instruct them in their duties, are classified into nine groups; the first refers to God; the second, to the Angels; the third, to the Church; the fourth, to the heavens; the fifth, to the air; the sixth, to the earth; the seventh, to the birds; the eighth, to the terrestrial animals; the ninth, to the different offices that men hold.

Happy is the preacher who succeeds in uniting in himself all that these figures represent!

## Chapter 3

# HOW ONE SHOULD BEGIN THIS OFFICE

We now consider the manner of beginning the office of preaching, and make two observations about it: Firstly, what can be found reprehensible in it; secondly, the great evils resulting from it.

### 3.1 Wrong Motives Which Lead Some to Undertake the Office of Preaching

In regard to this, there are three classes of faults to point out; some with regard to the person, others with regard to wrong motives which make the person act, others with regard to the premature beginning of this office.

1. There are some who want to be preachers before they are entirely rid of their faults, and they claim the right by referring to Isaias, who said to the Lord, “Lo, here am I. Call me” (Isai. 6:8). They do not observe that the Prophet had been first of all purified. “He who asked to be sent thus,” St. Gregory<sup>1</sup> tells us, “had previously felt the angel purify his lips with a burning coal taken from the altar, so that no one dared claim afterwards the right to enter upon the holy ministry before having been worthily purified.”

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<sup>1</sup>S. Greg., in *Pastorali*.

2. Some, purified though they may be, have not yet received all the supernatural gifts indispensable to them in order that they may distribute them to others. “There are some,” says St. Bernard,<sup>2</sup> “who show such an ardor to communicate spiritual benefits to others, that they deem themselves able to dispense these benefits before they possess them”; and it is against these that the holy doctor protests: “If you wish to act with discernment, take care first to become a reservoir, before becoming a canal; for the former has for its function to receive and diffuse, while the latter waits to be filled before it discharges a superabundance.” It is a question of the plenitude which St. Luke says comes from the Holy Spirit: “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak” (Acts 2:4). St. Paul, writing to the Romans, explains how this plenitude consists in charity and knowledge: “. . . you yourselves are full of love, filled with all knowledge, so that you are able to admonish one another” (Rom. 15:14). According to St. Bernard, such a plenitude results from the abundance of several graces which he specifies, namely: compunction, devotion, a constant effort to do penance, works of piety, prayerfulness, repose in contemplation, and the abundance of pure and tender love.
3. Others, although endowed with some good qualities, are not strengthened by supernatural virtue but remain plunged in darkness. It often happens that such preachers perish while working to save others. We read in the account of the lives of the Fathers of the desert that St. Apollonius retired to solitude at the age of fifteen; and having devoted forty years to the spiritual life, he heard one day a voice saying to him: “Apollonius, it is my wish to use you to confound the false wisdom of the wise men of Egypt; go therefore into the cities, for you shall raise up to me a righteous people.” Frightened, the poor anchorite replied: “My God, keep far from me the spirit of vainglory, lest being elevated above my brethren, I swerve from the path of righteousness.” Then the voice was heard again: “Put your hand on your head, and do not let what you grasp escape, but go bury it under the sand.” Having put his hand to his head, he found there a little black demon, which he buried under the sand as it cried: “I am the demon of pride.” The voice again spoke: “Now go.” And without hesitation he departed to preach. We should gather from this example how much the weak ought

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<sup>2</sup>S. Bern., Sermo 13, in *Cant.*



to fear the mission of preaching, seeing a man so perfected in the spiritual life filled with such terror. It is for this reason that St. Bernard said to one who was soliciting for this office: “What folly possesses you, my brother, what extravagance moves you to do this, seeking to take care of others, when you are still so weak; you whose very salvation is uncertain, whose virtue is a new and vacillating thing; you who are like a reed which bends before the least puff of wind; you whose charity would go beyond the commandment, loving your neighbor more than yourself—that charity which is still so weak that it melts like snow before the heat of the commandment, so entangled is it with ambition, so tormented by suspicions, disturbed by discussions, oppressed by trifling cares, smothered by the swellings of pride, and shriveled up by envy?”<sup>3</sup>

Secondly with regard to blameworthy motives, let us remark that many preachers are fascinated by the excellence of the office of preaching, and are moved by ambition to attain it. They would like, St. Gregory<sup>4</sup> tells us, to bear the title of doctor, to rise above others, and to sit at the head of the table, so to speak. They forget that the devil, seeking to tempt the Master, conducted Him to the pinnacle of the temple, where were located, according to the gloss, the high seats from which the doctors, smugly complaisant in their position and bloated with pride, addressed the people. It is against these that St. James said: “Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren . . .” (James 3:1); teachers in preaching, adds the gloss.

There are others who do not fear to turn what is done only for the salvation of souls, to their own glory and for the attainment of worldly goods. Aroused against these, St. Bernard says: “What a shame it is when those who have received the gift of the knowledge of God and are able preachers, seek in religion only their own gain, using for the sake of vanity what should serve solely the interests of God!”

Others, motivated by a false zeal, seek to compete with those who are more gifted, like the young Eliud who, thinking himself as clever as Job’s more learned friends, said with assurance: “I will also show you my wisdom” (Job 32:10).

But as St. Paul observes: “Are all apostles?” (I Cor. 12:29); or, as the gloss interprets it, are all destined to be preachers? As if St. Paul were to

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<sup>3</sup>S. Bern., Sermo 18, super *Cant.*

<sup>4</sup>S. Greg., in *Pastorali.*

say: Since this grace is not destined for all, all must not make it the object of their ambition.

Thus it is evident that the desire to be devoted to an office in itself so laudable, can be tainted either by ambition, or by having a wrong end in view, or by a misdirected zeal. It is for this reason that the gloss says of the “first places” spoken of by St. Matthew (Matt. 23:6), that it is not forbidden for teachers to occupy these places, but that it is forbidden them to love inordinately the places that they have, and to covet ambitiously the places of others.

As to the rash and premature acceptance of this mission, let us remark that not a few show an undue eagerness to assume this mission as soon as it is proffered them. St. Bernard ironically expresses their sentiments: “Although my knowledge is limited and I seem to know even less, yet I will not remain silent, for I must be ever ready to speak and instruct with my meager knowledge.” Quiet different was Jeremias, who, as St. Gregory notes, although called by God Himself, exclaimed in humility: “Ah, ah, ah, Lord God, behold, I cannot speak, for I am a child’ (Jer. 1:6).

Others not only rashly accept this office when called, but seek through their own efforts or through the efforts of others to have this mission entrusted to them. How far have they strayed from the example of Moses, who besought the Lord to dispense him from the office of liberator and to give it to another. “I beseech thee, Lord, send whom Thou wilt send” (Exod. 4:13), and so insistent was he that the Lord commissioned Aaron to speak in his stead. Is it not astonishing that this great man, chosen by God to be the instrument of His word, should procure the office for another; for another who is mediocre and who dared to arrange it that he be chosen!

There are yet others who are indignant because no one thinks of calling them to the ministry of preaching. “I am full of matter to speak of, and the spirit of my bowels straiteneth me” Eliud said to holy Job, “Behold my belly is as new wine which wanteth vent, which bursteth the new vessels” (Job 32:18-19). This is the error of those who, pushed on by ambition to preach, are thwarted in their desire, becoming interiorly disturbed, and like new wine which bursts from a leather bottle, they give vent to their impatience. However, says St. Gregory,<sup>5</sup> it is safer to refuse than to exercise such a ministry. Indeed, humble and holy men seek to have it given to others rather than seek it for themselves; and far from being impatient when they are ignored, they

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<sup>5</sup>S. Greg., in *Pastorali*.

consent from time to time to accept this office with great reluctance. It is a laudable constraint which compels some to accept, for, says St. Gregory,<sup>6</sup> again: “It is good to constrain some to the apostolate.”

To sum up, it is clear that in order to fill his office competently, the preacher must be capable, he must have a worthy end in view, and he must be summoned in virtue of holy obedience.

### 3.2 Concerning the Evils Resulting from the Untimely Undertaking of This Office

There are three evils to be noted which result from a premature and rash acceptance of the office of preaching.

The first is that the good results which the preacher might have produced at the proper time will be imperiled. It is necessary, St. Gregory<sup>7</sup> informs us, to warn those, who, because of their age or their incompetence, are unsuited to exercise this office, and who nevertheless meddle in it prematurely; for their rashness endangers the good results which they would later have achieved. Eager to undertake what they are not prepared for, they lose forever the good they might have accomplished at the right time.

The second evil resulting from too early entrance into the office of preaching is the obstacle which the preacher places in the way of his own formation; for whoever undertakes a task before he has the necessary strength makes himself for the future weak and useless. As one author of the lives of the Fathers admonishes: “Refrain from instructing too early, for you will thus weaken your understanding for the rest of your life.”

The third evil is the danger of the preacher losing his own soul. In regard to this St. Gregory<sup>8</sup> wishes that those who are impatient to assume the office of preacher to consider the fledglings which, before their wings are strong enough, try to fly into the skies, but soon fall back to earth; or to consider a foundation newly-built and insecure, which, instead of becoming a house when the superstructure is added to it, rather collapses and becomes a pile of ruins; or to consider those infants born prematurely before being completely formed in the womb of their mother, and who fill graves rather than homes.

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., part 1

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., part 3

<sup>8</sup>Loc. Cit.

The innumerable evils resulting from haste prompts Ecclesiasticus to say: “A wise man will hold his peace till he see opportunity” (Ecclus. 20:7).

It is also for this reason that Isaias gives the following warnings: “. . . and it shall bud without perfect ripeness and the sprigs thereof shall be cut off with pruning hooks: an what is left shall be cut away and shaken out. And they shall be left together to the birds of the mountains and the beasts of the earth: and the fowls shall be upon them all summer, and the beasts of the earth shall winter upon them” (Isai. 18:5-6).

And finally, it is for the same reason that our Lord Jesus Christ before His Ascension, commanded His preachers, the Apostles, “Wait here in the city until you be clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). St. Gregory,<sup>9</sup> explaining this, says: “We remain in the city when we retire into our innermost soul, not venturing forth with idle words, but waiting the coming of the divine power, before we appear before men to preach the truth which we now possess.”

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

## Chapter 4

# Concerning the Exercise of Preaching

With regard to the exercise of preaching, we shall discuss: firstly, the culpability of those who neglect to preach; secondly, the base reasons which dissuade some from this office; thirdly, what would constitute a lack of judgment in this office; fourthly, the conditions which are favorable to its proper fulfillment; fifthly, the qualities of good preaching; sixthly, the reasons why those who have received the gift of preaching ought to cooperate with this grace wholeheartedly.

### 4.1 The Culpability of Those Who Neglect to Preach

The prelate who does not preach is first of all deserving of this reproach, for he is bound by his very office to do so. “And Aaron shall be vested with it in the office of his ministry: that the sound may be heard, when he goeth and cometh out of the sanctuary in the sight of the Lord; and that he may not die” (Exod. 28:35).

Regarding this text, St. Gregory,<sup>1</sup> speaking of the priest who has the care of souls, observes that a priest is worthy of death when he goes and comes without being heard, for when he passes his life without preaching, he brings down upon himself the wrath of the Invisible Judge.

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<sup>1</sup>S. Greg., in *Pastorali*, part 2.

Next we note the culpability of the gifted preacher who does not put to good use the gift he has received. It is at such that St. Bernard directs his reproach: “You certainly deprive others of good when, although gifted with knowledge and eloquence, you enchain in a damnable silence the word which could help so many.”

Equally to be censured is the person who has received the order to preach and does not do it. “If when I say to the wicked,” said the Lord to Ezechiel, “thou shalt surely die: thou declare it not to him nor speak to him that he may be converted from his wicked way and live, the same wicked man shall dies in his iniquity but I will require his blood at thy hand” (Ezech. 3:18).

Particularly reprehensible is the one who remains silent before an audience disposed to listen to him. St. Chrysostom, expounding the text of St. Matthew in which it is written that “Jesus seeing the crowds, he went up the mountain” (Matt. 5:1) to preach, remarks that Our Lord was prompted to preach by the aspect of this crowd, just as a fisherman is moved to throw out his net, when he finds a favorable spot. What kind of a fisherman, indeed, would he be who let a catch slip through his fingers when the opportunity came to him? Still more blameworthy would the preacher be, if the people were not only disposed to listen to him, but earnestly besought him to speak. “The little ones have asked for bread,” says the Prophet Jeremias, “and there was none to break it unto them” (Lam. 4:4). “What a chastisement,” says St. Gregory, “do they deserve who see souls dying of hunger, yet do not distribute to them the bread of grace, which is theirs to give!”

They are still more guilty when they refuse those who are in dire need of their services. “Imagine,” says St. Gregory again, “the crime of those who are unwilling to preach the good word to their brethren enmeshed in sin, and keep from the dying the remedy which would have restored life to them!”

It is also necessary to point out that there are times when much fruit would result from preaching, but due to negligence these opportunities are lost. Regarding this it is written: “And refrain not to speak in the time of salvation” (Ecclus. 4:28). The same reproaches are incurred by the preacher who refuses to nourish with spiritual food the very people who have supplied him with the temporal goods necessary to sustain life. This is why Job said: “If I have eaten the fruits thereof without money . . . let thistles grow up to me instead of wheat . . .” (Job 31:39, 40). “To eat the fruits of the land without paying for them,” says St. Gregory, “is the injustice of whoever partakes of the bounty of the Church, and does not return to her, by way of preaching, a just payment.”

Finally, we must censure those who do not preach when everyone else is silent. For this omission, while it lasts, is more serious than if someone else did it, just as when we give alms to a person who will not get them from anyone else. In this regard the Lord said to Isaias: “The needy and the poor seek for waters, and there are none: their tongue hath been dry with thirst. I the Lord will hear them: I the God of Israel will not forsake them” (Isai. 41:17). As if to say: Because no one does it, I myself will do it. And this is what the preacher animated by the spirit of God must practice.

## 4.2 Concerning the Wicked Reasons Why Some do not Wish to Preach

Among the frivolous reasons why some men refuse to preach, we mention first the excessive diffidence of those who believe themselves incapable of preaching although they are fully competent to hold this office. To such as these the Book of Proverbs says: “Deliver them that are led to death: and those that are drawn to death forbear not to deliver. If thou say: I have not strength enough, He that seeth into the heart, he understandeth, and nothing deceiveth the keeper of thy soul: and he shall render to a man according to his works” (Prov. 24:11-12). According to the gloss, this text ought to be applied to preachers.

In the same category should be placed the false humility of those who deem themselves unworthy of so exalted an office. They make a great mistake when they refuse to obey in this matter. St. Gregory says: “One who is inclined to refuse should not absolutely resist, but should take care lest pride, under the guise of humility, cause him to refuse the great glory to which his is destined.”<sup>2</sup>

With these latter we should place those who are held back by an excessive love of the quiet of the contemplative life. St. Gregory against these says: “There are some who, endowed with excellent qualities, reserve all their ardor for contemplation, and who refuse to work, through preaching, for the salvation of their neighbor. They love the quiet of the hidden life, and shut themselves up in their meditations; but if judged strictly, they will be found responsible for having omitted much that would have been profitable if done

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<sup>2</sup>S. Greg., in *Pastorali*, part 1.

among men.”<sup>3</sup>

There are some who shrink from the active life of preaching because they are frightened by the sins which they see other preachers fall into. It is of such that Ecclesiasticus says: “For better is the iniquity of a man, than a woman doing a good turn” (Ecclus. 42:14). St. Bernard explains this by attributing “the iniquity of man” to certain faults committed by the preacher; whilst the “good turn” of the woman indicates the purity of the soul that remains in the quiet of the contemplative life. The first, rightly, being proclaimed as better, that is, more useful, than the second. Often, in fact, the active life is better, although in it one may rub elbows with evil, than the permanent indolence of a retirement for the sake of keeping a perfect purity.

Others shrink from the laborious preparation that such a ministry demands. They devote a great deal of time to gathering the material for their sermons and then wait for a perfection which they never will attain before they make use of them. And when their friends are asleep and fire consumes their house, or enemies invade it, they do not awaken their sleeping friends. “Run about, make haste, stir up thy friend” (Prov. 6:3), cries the Book of Proverbs to them, and, according to the gloss, it is addressed to the negligent preacher.

Others are deterred from preaching because of a pusillanimity which seizes them when they think of this work. Let them give ear to the Lord Who will strengthen them through the words of Isaias which the gloss applies to preachers: “Say to the faint-hearted, take courage, and fear not” (Isai. 35:4).

There are others too lazy to prepare any sermon which demands of them application and hard work. St. Paul was intent upon fighting this sloth when he wrote to his disciple: “But do thou be watchful in all things, bear with tribulation patiently, work as a preacher of the gospel” (II Tim. 4:5). As if to say to him: “Do not shirk the work of writing sermons because of the vigils and fatigue which they will impose upon you, but bear up under them and acquit yourself worthily.”

Others fear the want which they will have to endure. This especially is the lot of preachers who are poor since they have neither revenues nor assured fees. Would to heaven that they would remember the privation that Jesus Christ had to suffer in His ministry! “And when he had looked round upon all things,” St. Mark narrates, “then, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany” (Mark 11:11). He looked around, the gloss tells us, to see if anyone

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid.



would offer Him hospitality. And so great was His poverty that not one was found in so large a city to honor Him with the hospitality of his house. What preacher of our day has ever been in such need that he could not find in any city the necessities for his sustenance?

Others are afraid of the bodily fatigue which traveling would impose upon them; forgetting that St. Paul, the perfect model of the apostle, added to the fatigue of traveling constant manual labor. “For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil. We worked night and day so as not to be a burden on any of you while we preached to you the gospel of God” (I Thess. 2:9).

Others, again, are rebuffed by the unpleasant dispositions of certain pastors of the Church, who hinder rather than foster preaching. They are like the Scribes and Pharisees of the Jews, and the priests of the pagans, who sought to prevent Christ from preaching and violently persecuted those who proclaimed the Gospel, as we see in the Acts of the Apostles and the stories of the Saints. If the first preachers had retreated in the face of this opposition, the faith of Christ would not be preached today. If such cruel persecutions did not prevent these men of God from fulfilling their duty, then present-day preachers can find no justifiable excuse for their silence or desertion in such an obstacle as an unsympathetic pastor.

Yet, others are shocked at the impiety of the people. Willingly do they preach to pious and eager listeners, yet they abandon those who have greater need of their assistance. Do we not know that the Lord sent His prophets not only to the faithful, but also to an obdurate people? “And they to whom I sent thee are a children of a hard face and an obstinate heart,” He said to the prophet Ezechiel (Ezech. 2:4).

Others, having preached once without receiving praise, are discouraged. One could not be perfected in any art with such an attitude. Who has ever learned to speak Latin, without having for a long time used incorrect grammar? Who has ever learned to write well without having first written badly? And this is true of all things. It is only by overcoming repeated mistakes that one arrives at perfection in any art. This is why the Philosopher says: “It is by putting the hand to the work that the worker becomes capable.” And so it is in practicing to preach. Although one may be pretty bad at the beginning, yet he will arrive at success eventually.

Others remain silent because of the great number of preachers, saying to themselves: “What need is there for me to preach, when there are so many others doing so?” Thus they deprive themselves of the reward promised to preachers in the Psalms, which “increase in a fruitful old age” (Ps. 91:15).

Whoever wants to share in a catch of fish accompanies the fishermen, in the same way whoever wants to share in the merits of those who preach, ought to preach as much as he can. When Simon Peter said, "I am going fishing," his companions replied: "We also are going with thee" (John 21:3).

Others, finally, do not wish to go preaching in uncongenial company; for as it is necessary that there be at least two on this ministry, they prefer to deprive themselves of the fruits of preaching rather than work with certain others. But although it is written: "Thou shalt not plough with an ox and an ass together" (Deut. 22:10), the poor farmer would rather harness together the ox and ass than leave his land uncultivated. Now the oxen represent the preachers, who, according to the gloss, are named in the Book of Job: "the widow's oxen" (Job 24:3), that is to say the Church's. Would not the herdsman who must give an account of the products of the land to the householder have the right to complain of an ox which would not be teamed with a horse or an ass although there was not other ox available?

The preacher must give up, then, these frivolous pretexts and apply himself zealously to preaching, as St. Paul recommended to his disciple, Timothy, when he said to him: "Preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season" (II Tim. 4:2).

### **4.3 Defects of Judgment Which are Harmful to the Preacher**

First of all, let us remark that it would be bad judgment to address oneself to those who have no wish to hear the word of God, and we ought not to preach to them. "Where there is no hearing, pour out not words" (Ecclus. 32:6). And the same holds for those who listen, but understand nothing, as if they were senseless. "A fool," the Book of Proverbs (Prov. 18:2) says, "receiveth not (that is in his understanding) the words of prudence." It is not necessary then to preach to such. "In the ears of fools," adds Proverbs (Prov. 23:9), "speak not." So also for those who defame the preacher: "Do not," says St. Matthew (Matt. 7:6), "give to dogs what is holy"; and these dogs, the gloss tells us, are those who only know how to bark and to tear in pieces what was once whole. There are some who vilify the holiness of doctrine, which, therefore, should not be preached to them. "Neither throw your pearls before swine" (Matt. 7:6), St. Matthew adds. The swine, according to the gloss, are

those who scorn and trample under foot holy doctrine.

Some people, much like certain great sinners, tempt the Lord, even to the point of rendering themselves unworthy of the grace attached to preaching. It was said to Ezechiel: “And I will make thy tongue stick fast to the roof of thy mouth, and thou shalt be dumb, and not as a man that reproveth: because they are a provoking house” (Ezech. 3:26). They provoked this anger, says the gloss, because their malice and revolt against the Lord were so great that they no longer deserved to hear the voice of reproach. Which shows that sin, in multiplying, ends by rendering those who are guilty unworthy even of being corrected by God.

Others, still more wicked, blaspheme against the Gospel, as do the infidels, and we must take great care not to preach to them publicly. It was thus that “the Jews contradicted what was said by Paul and blasphemed. Then Paul and Barnabas spoke out plainly: ‘It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first, but since you reject it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we now turn to the Gentiles’” (Acts 13:45, 46).

Let us remark, secondly, that it should not be necessary to preach the same thing to all; but that one should adapt his preaching to his different hearers. St. Gregory the Great says on this subject: “A long time ago Gregory of Nazianzen, of happy memory, taught that one and the same exhortation is not convenient for all men, having observed that all are not formed by the same habits. Often what profits some harms others, as herbs which nourish certain animals, cause others to perish; a soft whistling which calms a horse excites a dog; a medicine which tempers one disease strengthens another; bread which fortifies a mature man, would cause the death of a little child.”<sup>4</sup>

In fact, one should address in an entirely different manner men and women; young people and the aged; the rich and the poor; the joyful and the sad; simple subjects and their prelates; servants and their masters; the wise and the foolish; the modest and the shameless; the timid and the bold; the patient and the hasty; the benevolent and the jealous; the innocent and the impure; the healthy and the sick; those who from fear of chastisement live in virtue and those who are so hardened that no punishment corrects them; the taciturn and the garrulous; the industrious and the lazy; the gentle and the angry; the humble and the proud; the steadfast and the vacillating; the mod-

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<sup>4</sup>S. Greg., in *Pastorali*, part 3.

erate and the glutton; the merciful and the covetous; those who do not want either to take from another or to share their own, and those who willingly share what they possess, but sometimes take what belongs to another; the quarrelsome and the peaceful; those who sow discord and those who bring peace; those who do not listen as they should, and those who listen and understand, but without humility; those who preach well, but through humility dread to, and those whom age and imperfection should keep from preaching, but who allow themselves to be carried away by their presumption; those who prosper in their temporal affairs and those who in their pursuit of the goods of this world are unfortunate; those who are bound to the obligations of marriage and those who have not undertaken those obligations; those who deplore having sinned in deed and those who have sinned only in thought; those who regret having done evil, but continue to do evil, and those who, ceasing to do evil, have no regret for past faults; those who boast of their sins, and those who accuse themselves of them without correcting them; those who succumb to temptation by surprise and those who fall deliberately; those who do not commit grave sins but frequently commit venial sins, and those who are watchful lest they commit slight sins, although they are sometimes guilty of grave sins; those who never think of doing good, and those who do not finish the good already undertaken; those who hide the good that they do and let themselves be judged for certain wicked actions which they do in public. All the preceding is from St. Gregory.

Let us remark again that there are some who preach too often, and others who preach too little; both are to be blamed, for, as St. Gregory says, "Preaching rarely is not enough, preaching too often becomes cheap." It is necessary, then, to find the happy medium; for preaching like rain, in order to be useful, must be neither too rare nor too frequent.

Let us add that the manner of expressing oneself ought not to be the same in all sermons; but that it should vary according to the speaker, or according to those whom he addresses, or according to the subject of which he speaks. The preacher, in fact, should use a different style according as his authority is little or great; if his authority is slight then he should preach with humility, if his authority is greater he has the right to express himself with more severity. "The poor (who have no authority), will speak with supplications," says the Proverbs, "and the rich will speak roughly" (Prov. 18:23). Thus did John the Baptist, who, being rich in virtue, permitted himself to say to the Pharisees, "Brood of vipers . . ." (Matt. 3:7). Thus did St. Stephen, who, being rich in the fullness of the Holy Spirit, dared to say to the high priests: "Stiffnecked

and uncircumcised in heart and ear . . .” (Acts 7:51). Thus did St. Paul who, being invested with the power of God, could say to the Jews of Rome: “Well did the Holy Spirit speak through Isaias the prophet to our fathers saying: ‘Go to this people and say: With ear you will hear and will not understand’” (Acts 28:25-26).

Our Lord Himself spoke very differently to His disciples than he did to the Scribes and Pharisees; to the first he promised a great reward, saying to them with sweetness: “Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God” (Luke 6:20), while to the others he said in a menacing tone, “Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites” (Matt. 23:13).

Finally, we ought not to speak of the sins of men as we speak of the benefits of God. We should speak with compassion of sin, for the subject of sin is sad, and it is in this tone that St. Paul said to the Philippians: “For many walk, of whom I have told you often and now tell you with weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is ruin, their god is the belly, their glory is in their shame, they mind the things of earth” (Phil. 3:18-19). In treating of the benefits of God, on the contrary, we should be joyful saying with the same Apostle: “I give thanks to my God always for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus, because in everything you have been enriched in him, in all utterance and in all knowledge” (I Cor. 1:4-5). With common people, one can speak without too much circumspection; but with the learned, it is necessary to have a certain refinement. Before tyrants we should be audacious; before the great who live good lives, we should be respectful; we should be carried away by the fervor of the Spirit, or be moderate according to the counsels of prudence, consoling the timid, frightening the presumptuous, in short, changing the tone of the discourse as a singer changes the tones of his song. As it is very difficult to have always the right manner of speech, the Apostle St. Paul addressing the Colossians begged them to pray for him: “Pray for us also, that God may give us an opportunity for the word, to announce the mystery of Christ (for which also I am in chains), that I may openly announce it as I ought to speak” (Col. 4:3).

Let us note that it is necessary to choose the right time to preach “for there is a time to keep silence, and a time to speak,” says Ecclesiastes (Eccles. 3:7). When the people are otherwise occupied and cannot come to hear the preacher would not be a propitious time. Mary Magdalen freed herself from the duties of the household in order to listen to the Saviour, as it is

written in Saint Luke.<sup>5</sup> Neither would that be a propitious time in which to preach when men are plunged in sadness and are unable to relish the holy word; that is why the friends of Job<sup>6</sup> were silent for seven days in the presence of so great an affliction. Nor would that be a fit time to preach when men are heavy with sleep and have difficulty in paying attention, as Ecclesiasticus insinuates where it says: “He speaketh with one that is asleep, how uttereth wisdom to a fool” (Ecclus. 22:9). Again, it would be disadvantageous to preach when a tumult rages and there is no sign of it being quelled. Thus St. Paul before speaking motioned for silence with his hand.<sup>7</sup> Finally, when the audience is badly disposed towards the preacher is not the time to preach; that is why St. Paul and Barnabas<sup>8</sup> withdrew, remarking that the Jews stirred up persecution against them. Indeed then “in every business,” there is, according to Ecclesiastes, “a time and an opportunity” (Eccles. 8:6). And the preacher ought to avoid preaching when the hour is not opportune, lest his preaching produce no effect. That is why St. Gregory remarks that St. Paul, in recommending to Timothy to preach “in season, out of season” (II Tim. 4:2), took care to say first “in season” before adding “out of season,” for preaching is to no avail if there is not, even with its rashness, a certain seasonableness.

Let us note, finally, that not every place is suitable for solemn preaching, for one must not preach in secret assemblies, as do the heretics; but in public like our Lord, Who spoke in broad daylight saying nothing in secret.<sup>9</sup> Public places and crossroads where men carry on business and employ themselves in worldly affairs, and other places whose secular use makes them unfit for this ministry ought not to be used for preaching. One should choose suitable places, as did St. Paul, who spoke in the synagogues; or as Our Lord, Who spoke in the temple, or sometimes in the country, apart from the bustle of the world. Also, preaching ought not to be carried on in any place where the audience might be exposed to danger, but rather a safe and secure place should be found, where there is no risk of that disaster which happened to the disciples of Theodas and Judas of Galilee.<sup>10</sup>

From the preceding we draw the following conclusions. Some are bound

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<sup>5</sup>Luke 10:39

<sup>6</sup>Job 2:13

<sup>7</sup>Acts 13:16

<sup>8</sup>Acts 13:51

<sup>9</sup>John 8.

<sup>10</sup>Acts 5:36-37

to preach, others to refrain from it; those who preach must vary their sermons according to their diverse audiences; they must arrange the number of their sermons so that they be neither too frequent, nor too rare; they must adapt the manner of their preaching to the taste of particular cases; preaching must be distinct in all places and at all times; preachers must be prudent and not preach unless they are capable, and must not choose subjects ill-suited to their listeners; finally, they must guard against preaching too seldom or too often, and they must preach only in a suitable manner, time, and place. By so doing they will acquit themselves well of their charge; and by ever considering what sort of person their hearer is, what kind of discourse suits him, how often, when, and where they must preach, and such like, they will become worthy preachers of the word.

## 4.4 Conditions Favorable for Discharging This Office Well

Among the conditions favorable for preaching well, freedom from all other occupations must take first place. That is why the Apostles assigned the care of the table to the deacons, in order that they could devote themselves more freely to preaching, saying: “It is not desirable that we should forsake the word of God and serve at tables” (Acts 6:2). Our Lord said to a disciple who asked permission to go to bury his father: “Leave the dead to bury their own dead: but do thou go and proclaim the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:60). St. Paul, for the same reason, stopped administering baptism, saying: “For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel” (I Cor. 1:17). When such holy men believe it their duty to give up these pious works to be more free to devote themselves to preaching, who much more willingly ought the preacher to put aside all other work so that he may be free from all distractions and have the liberty to serve the true sons of Abraham according to the spirit.

Another thing helpful to the preacher is a tranquility of soul, a freedom from all disturbance; for uneasiness is an obstacle to the work of the preacher, and St. Gregory<sup>11</sup> remarks that it belongs to the tranquil and detached spirit to speak of God; for the tongue is carefully controlled in discourse, when the spirit rests in a perfect truth.

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<sup>11</sup>S. Greg., in *Ezech.*, Hom. 12.

Also of advantage in this office, is a knowledge of all that the profane sciences have to offer for use for the composition of sermons. As a builder gathers from many sources whatever he needs for his edifice, so too the preacher has recourse to many sources for his material. The gloss applies the text of Paralipomenon: “Then Josaphat came and all the people with him to take away the spoils of the dead” (II Par. 20:25), to the holy doctors who gather from the enemies discourses, writings, and lectures on physics, ethics, logic, and so forth—spoils very useful to the Church. The result is that the vain knowledge of the enemies becomes for the faithful a rich treasure, and a most helpful means of sanctification. Far more profitable still are the arguments which Holy Scripture furnishes for every question. It is necessary, says St. Gregory, that anyone preparing to preach seek the first causes of things in the sacred Books in order to support what he says with divine authority and to establish his whole discourse upon this unshakable foundation. It will be no less advantageous to mingle prayer with work, for the power of prayer renders preaching more efficacious. St. Augustine says with good reason, “Whoever speaks ought, as far as possible, to speak of just and holy matters, in order to be heard with pleasure, understanding, and docility; but if he is successful, he must not doubt that it is due to prayer more than to rhetoric; he ought to pray, therefore, both for himself and for his auditors, and he ought to be a man of prayer, before being a teacher.”<sup>12</sup>

To strengthen this personal prayer, we should also obtain the prayers of others. That is why St. Paul, who was both a great teacher and preacher, putting all his trust in the prayers of others, said to the Christians of Thessalonica: “In conclusion, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run and be glorified even as among you” (II Thess. 3:1).

From time to time the preacher should also renew his strength by rest. In the ordinary walks of life, indeed, men rest from their work, so that they may return to their employment with greater zest. The preacher should to the same in order to regain his strength, and so discharge his office more capably. Thus, the workers employed by Solomon to cut down the cedars of Libanus, and who prefigured preachers, according to the gloss, took a rest of two months, resuming their work on the third month. The rest of the preacher, however, should not be one of complete idleness; but should be used for reading, study, and meditation, all of which will later benefit his

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<sup>12</sup>S. Aug. *De doctrina Christi*, lib. 4.



preaching. This is the thought of St. Gregory who recommends to preachers to “assimilate in contemplation what they will pass on to their neighbor, when the time comes to preach the word of God.”

It is still more important for the preacher to fortify himself beforehand against the danger of falling into certain faults easily committed in preaching. For just as a sailor would be culpable if he indulged his liking for fishing, and neglected to forearm himself against storms and other dangers which the sailor's life causes him to risk; so the preacher would be foolhardy who exposed himself to the occasion of sin, while zealously working to save others. This is what prompted our Lord to utter those grave words: “For what does it profit a man if he gain the whole world but suffer the loss of his own soul?” (Matt. 16:26.)

It is also salutary after having preached, to make a thorough examination of conscience. For the prudent preacher, when he has returned home, has need of entering within himself and considering thoroughly all that he has just done, in order to purify himself from the stains he has contracted, and to repair the losses he has suffered, just as a traveler, arriving at an inn, cleans and repairs his shoes so that he may resume his journey under better conditions. For this reason the prophet Ezechiel, on his return from the fields, was told: “Go and shut thyself up in the midst of thy house” (Ezech. 3:24). St. Gregory comments that after laboring in the fields of the Lord and having administered to his neighbor the grace of doctrine, the preacher is commanded to retire in order that he may enter within his conscience and examine it minutely.

Let us recommend again the observance of silence, after the example of Ezechiel who said: “And I came to them of the captivity . . . and I sat where they sat: and I remained there seven days, mourning in the midst of them. And at the end of seven days the word of the Lord came to me” (Ezech. 3:15,16). Note well, says St. Gregory,<sup>13</sup> that the prophet had been sent by heaven to preach and, nevertheless, he remained silent for seven days, doing nothing but weeping; for he alone can speak according to the truth, who has known how to keep silence. The observance of silence is the nourishment of the word.

Let us also recommend sanctity; for according to Ecclesiasticus “the soul of a holy man discovereth sometimes true things more than seven watchman that sit in a high place to watch” (Ecclus. 37:18). This causes St. Gregory

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<sup>13</sup>S. Greg., in *Ezech.*

to say that the habitual practice of holy love will help preaching more than the knowledge acquired by experience.

In conclusion let us advise that great care and circumspection must precede the sermon, for in all things he who plans carefully beforehand what he wishes to do and know it is to be done produces the greater effect. The preacher should follow this example: “And I went out by night,” says Esdras, “by the gate of the valley; and I viewed the wall of Jerusalem which was broken down, and the gates thereof which were consumed with fire” (II Esd. 2:13). On this text the Venerable Bede observes that Esdras had encircled the ruins, in order to study carefully the best means of rebuilding them. In the same way spiritual teachers must keep watch during the night, while others are asleep, carefully examining the state of the Church and determining, on the other hand, how to repair the damage inflicted on themselves during combat with vice.

## 4.5 Qualities of Good Preaching

It is laudable to preach more often when preaching is more necessary. Would it be just to preach daily to religious, if in doing so those who have greater need of preaching were neglected? Did not Our Lord say: “It is not the healthy who need a physician, but they who are sick” (Matt. 9:12)? It is also more commendable to preach where others have not preached, than to preach where the holy word has often been heard. What kind of gardener is he who neglects the parched sections of the land and irrigates those parts which are well watered? “But I have not preached this gospel,” said St. Paul, “where Christ has already been named . . . but even as it is written: They who have not been told of him shall see, and they who have not heard shall understand” (Rom. 15:20, 21). It is blameworthy to neglect less populous places, like those who do not like to preach outside the great towns and cities. They have been condemned by Our Lord Jesus Christ Who moved about in the strongholds; that is, in the villages, to teach in the neighborhood (Matt. 9:35). Again, like Him, we should make it a rule not to pass through any place without preaching there, as St. Matthew tells us: “And Jesus was going about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom” (Matt. 4:23). It is no longer permitted to keep the word of God from certain classes of men: “Preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15) where the words of Our Lord just before He ascended

into heaven.

It is right, however, to prefer those whom we hope to convert, overlooking those whose hearts are hardened; as the Apostles did, when they abandoned the obstinate Jews to turn towards the Gentiles (Acts 13:46). Our Lord Himself had invited them when He said to them: “Lift up your eyes and behold that the fields are already white for the harvest” (John 4:35), as though He wished to say: There where the harvest is ready, go, then, and gather it in.

But it is also a duty of the preacher to be more vigorous wherever the malice is greater. When perversity increases, says St. Gregory,<sup>14</sup> preaching must not weaken, but on the contrary, it ought to become more vehement.

All the preceding considerations have been about those to whom we ought to preach, but there are also some which pertain to the preacher himself.

He must carefully avoid giving reason for any opposition that might cause trouble among the clergy and the people, and eventually force him to interrupt his preaching.

It was to prevent such a disorder that St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians that he “bore all things to avoid raising obstacles to the Gospel of his God” (I Cor. 9:12). Nevertheless, the preacher should not allow himself to be discouraged easily, like those who abandon preaching at the slightest trouble or obstacle. On this subject St. Paul once wrote to Timothy: “I charge thee, in the sight of God and Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead by his coming and by his kingdom, preach the word, be urgent in season, out of season . . .” (II Tim. 4:1-2).

He should be careful also to preach not only the word but to preach it with his whole person, like St. John the Baptist who, for this reason, is called a “voice,” because the word was in him completely (Isai. 40).

In money one takes into account the metal, the stamp and the weight; likewise, in a doctor of the Church one evaluates what he teaches, what he imitates, and what he does. The doctrine is the metal, the example of the Fathers which he follows is the stamp, humility is the weight. Whoever turns aside from duty is no longer precious metal, but only a worthless piece of clay; where formerly he had the sound of pure metal, now he produces no sound at all.

The preacher must persevere in his office and watch that he does not become tired too soon. As one day’s rain does not greatly help a parched

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<sup>14</sup>S. Greg., in *Homil.*

land which needs a more plentiful rainfall, so one sermon or a few isolated sermons will not be of great use. This was not the practice of the Saviour, of Whom it is written: "He as teaching daily in the temple" (Luke 19:47).

The preacher should add particular advice to his dogmatic sermons, at all times and in all places, as St. Paul did, and as he says: "I have declared it to you and taught you in public and from house to house" (Acts 20:20); and again: "for three years night and day I did not cease without tears to admonish every one of you" (Acts 20:31).

He should understand well the prescriptions of the divine law; for, as a faithful messenger, he must transmit exactly the message he has received. "Whatever I shall command they, thou shalt speak to them," the Lord said to Jeremias (Jer. 1:7). And who will be surprised at a true preacher being faithful to his recommendation when Balaam said of himself: "If Balac would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot alter the word of the Lord my God, to speak either more or less" (Num. 22:18).

The preacher should speak with fervor, like Apollos of whom it is said: "Now a certain Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, and mighty in the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and being fervent in spirit, used to speak and teach carefully whatever had to do with Jesus" (Acts 18:24).

He should speak the truth without fear, especially to sinners, as the Apostles did when they preached the word of God to the Jews with fearlessness; or like Micheas who said: "But yet I am filled with the strength of the spirit of the Lord, with judgment and power: to declare unto Jacob his wickedness and to Israel his sin" (Mich. 3:8). However, he should know how to temper his speech so as not to offend anyone with over-harsh words. "Admonish without repulsing," says St. Ambrose, "and exhort without offending." Finally, he will apply himself to everything, as is his duty, in order to fulfill his ministry with all care; otherwise he will not produce great results. "Use all care," St. Paul recommends his disciple Timothy, "to present thyself to God as a man approved, a worker that cannot be ashamed," that is to say, devoted to God's honor, "rightly handling the word of truth" (II Tim. 2:15).

## 4.6 Motives for Devoting Oneself to Preaching When One is Capable of It

Among the exercises of the supernatural life which occupy spiritual men in general, those who have the gift of preaching ought to consecrate themselves to it in preference to every other, and this is for the three following reasons:

First of all their work enjoys special prerogatives which do not belong to others. Indeed, there are some who mortify the flesh by fasts, abstinences, coarse garments, vigils, and similar practices. All this is, according to the Apostle, of certain value but preaching is more useful,<sup>15</sup> as has been seen above in the fifth paragraph. Moreover, who could adequately describe all the pains that a preacher, poor and zealous for the good of souls, endures in the care he expends in their behalf, in the fatigues of travel, in numerous privations, in anxiety concerning his success, and so many other similar causes, so that he has been compared to a woman in the pains of childbirth, exposed to sufferings truly inexpressible? Has not St. Paul said: “My dear children, with whom I am in labor again, until Christ is formed in you” (Gal. 4:19)? Likewise, a religious of the order of Citeaux, who became a Friar Preacher, said that he suffered in his new life, in a few days, much more than in the whole time spent in his first vocation. It is true, then, that one ought to prefer preaching to fasting and other forms of mortifying the flesh, since there results from it, with the same sacrifices and from even greater ones, a usefulness to one’s neighbor which is incomparably greater.

There are some who with love apply themselves to works of corporal mercy, but preaching, because it devotes all its zeal to the salvation of souls in danger of death, surpasses in excellence the above mentioned works, as the soul surpasses the body. For this reason Our Lord said to him who wished to bury his father: “Leave the dead to bury their own dead, but do thou go and proclaim the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:60). So that if it is necessary, according to this command, to place preaching above the duty of burying one’s father, one of the most pious of corporal works of mercy, how much more should preaching in general be placed above all the works which have as their object only the well-being of the body. Whoever by his word nourishes souls with everlasting food does more, St. Gregory observes, than he who gives material bread in order to preserve the life of the body.

Some devote themselves especially to the holy exercise of prayer, either for

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<sup>15</sup>I Tim. 4.

themselves or for others; but their prayer is of less value than preaching, for the prayer of a sinner for his neighbor does not profit the latter, whereas the preaching of even the extremely wicked is sometimes very useful to others, as happened to Balaam, and to ourselves today and for all time. “If I have not charity,” St. Paul said, it is true, “I am like a tinkling cymbal” (I Cor. 13:1); nevertheless, this cymbal is useful to others, although it merits nothing for itself.

Others apply themselves to the study of holy writings but if this study has not preaching for its end, of what use is it? “Wisdom that is hid, and treasure that is not seen: what profit is there in them both?” (Ecclus. 20:32). Similarly the Apostle advises his disciple to apply himself at the same time “to reading and to doctrine” (I Tim. 4:16). He places reading first but he adds doctrine because the latter is the end of the former; but the end is always preferable to the means which are subordinate to it.

Others put their devotion in holy objects and in the celebration of the sacred mysteries of the Mass; but although the Sacrament of the Eucharist procures for the Church the greatest benefits, it could happen to be perilous for many who are unworthy of it. “For he who eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks judgment to himself” (I Cor. 11:29), as St. Paul declares; and if it is thus of the faithful, what will it be of the one who consecrates unworthily? Different is the condition of the preacher, for a sinner, provided his is not a public sinner, can preach without offense to God.

Others willingly occupy themselves with the hearing of confessions, but the work of the preacher is more excellent; for the confessor can give help to only one at a time, whereas the preacher addresses a great number simultaneously. Thus it was that the preaching of St. Peter converted about three thousand souls at one time, and about five thousand at another time. Other confer Baptism, Confirmation, Extreme Unction, the consecration of virgins, the ordination of clerics, or the other Sacraments of the Church, but these Sacraments do not profit adults, if they have not a sufficient knowledge of them with and expressed will to receive them; but it is preaching which gives them these good dispositions. Job said to God: “With the hearing of the ear, I have heard thee”—in preaching—“but now my eye seeth thee,” that is the first effect, namely, true knowledge; “therefore I reprehend myself” (Job 42:5-6), the second effect, which is good will; but these results are obtained without the assistance of the Sacraments, by preaching alone, which consequently, under this aspect, is preferable to them.

Others finally consecrate themselves to the praises of God following assid-

uously in church the Divine Office, but the laity usually does not comprehend the words which are recited in the Office, whereas they do understand the language and instructions of the preacher. By preaching, too, God is extolled more manifestly and clearly than by these Offices and for this reason it is called the “Praise of God” by *autonomasia* in Psalm 72, where our version says: “That I may declare your preachings in the gates of the daughter of Sion” (Ps. 72:28), while another version, in place of “preachings,” has “praises.”

From all that has just been said, it can be seen how many prerogatives preaching enjoys, and of its preference over many other spiritual works.

The second reason which should lead us to prefer preaching is found in certain examples which recommend it. Jesus Christ, in the whole time He spent upon earth, celebrated Mass but once, at the Last Supper; moreover, it is not said that He heard one confession; He administered the Sacraments rarely and to a small number; He never devoted Himself to the recitation of the canonical Office; and one can make the same observation about all the rest, except for preaching and prayer. It is also worthy of note that when He began to preach He spent more time in that than in prayer. Similarly, the most excellent of the Apostles, thanking God for his ministry, declared that he had baptized few; “For Christ did not send me,” he said, “to baptize, but to preach” (I Cor. 1:17), and we see, in fact, that he devoted himself to no other spiritual function like he did to preaching. He said to the Romans: “From Jerusalem round about as far as Illyricum I have completed the gospel of Christ” (Rom. 15:19); and after that he traveled to the western regions to preach the Gospel to them also. Did the other Apostles and disciples of the Lord, throughout the world, devote themselves to any other task more than they did to preaching? “They went forth,” says St. Mark, “and preached everywhere” (Mark 16:20). And so for our instruction there is the example of Our Lord, of St. Paul, and of all the Apostles and disciples of Jesus Christ.

The third reason why we should prefer preaching to every other work is that Our Lord seemed to wish it to be so. Did He not recommend it in fact, at the moment of His Ascension, as a work supremely pleasing to Him? “Go,” He said, “into the whole world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:16). And according to the gloss, did He not reserve, as a special recompense for this office, a crown in the form of a halo which surmounted the table of the twelve loaves of proposition?<sup>16</sup> So as to insure the exercise

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<sup>16</sup>Exod. 25:25—The Venerable Bede has stated that these loaves of proposition are

of this office, God has, in addition, performed great miracles, infusing in an instant into unlettered and common men the highest knowledge, granting them the gift of tongues, and the power to work miracles in order to confirm their words, all of which shows how much more pleasing is the work to Him than any other kind.

Since preaching enjoys such prerogatives, since it is recommended by such examples, since it is so dear to God, it is only right that it be preferred to all other kinds of work by spiritual men capable of undertaking it; and for them it also becomes a duty: “Woe to me,” said St. Paul, “if I do not preach, for it is a duty incumbent on me” (I Cor. 9:16).



## Chapter 5

# OMITTING TO PREACH OR REFUSING TO LISTEN

There are three things to be considered regarding this subject: Firstly, for what reasons preaching is sometimes forbidden or impossible: secondly, what is to be said of those who deprive themselves of this grace: thirdly, what losses follow upon it.

### 5.1 Exterior Causes of Omission or Refusal

It may happen that the cause of this omission is known to God alone. For when, in St. Luke, the Lord says, “Woe to thee Corozain” (Luke 10:13), the gloss asks why preaching was addressed to those who were not to believe and refused to those who would have embraced the faith? And the answer is: “He knows that, Who knows all things.”

Likewise, it may be that the omission occurs through an intervention of the devil. “I saw,” says St. John in the Apocalypse, “four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding fast the four winds of the earth, that no wind should blow over the earth, or over the sea, or upon any tree” (Apoc. 7:2). Concerning this the gloss adds that the demon strives with his accomplices to hinder preaching everywhere. Were not these accomplices among the Jews, the Scribes and Pharisees? Were not these accomplices among the pagans, the idolatrous priests? And among the Saracens, Mohammed? Sometimes God wills such omissions through mercy for the hearers; for example when Paul and Barnabas “were forbidden by the Holy Spirit

to speak the word in the province of Asia” (Acts 16:6). The Lord Who knew the hearts of these men, says the gloss, very wisely prevented them from preaching to the people of Asia, so that holy things would not be given to dogs, and that these sinners would not be judged for having rejected such a gift.

In some instances the fault will be in the hearers. “And I will make thy tongue stick to the roof of thy mouth” (Ezech. 3:26), the Lord said to Ezechiel, “because they are a provoking house.” This is the case, says the gloss, when preaching is withheld from the hearers as punishment for their iniquity.

As other times it will be the fault of the prelates. “The little ones have asked for bread,” says the prophet Jeremias, “and there was none to break it unto them” (Lam. 4:4); no one, neither priest, archdeacon, nor bishop. And this is either because they are incapable, or because their time is completely taken up with the pursuit of worldly things, or because they lack zeal for souls and have no solicitude for them.

Sometimes it will be the prelates themselves who place an obstacle to preaching; for there are some who not only do not preach, but even hinder those who could fruitfully do so in their place. “They kept thy children shut up, by whom the pure light of the law was to be given to the world” (Wisd. 18:4); in effect, to prevent preachers from freely preaching is to imprison them.

At other times the privation of preaching will be a punishment for human curiosity, when, for example, people come to a sermon, not to profit from it, but solely for the pleasure of listening. Thus we read in the life of the Fathers that certain Brothers came to the abbé Felix bringing some lay folk who wished to hear something edifying, and after making them wait for a while he said to them: “My brothers, today I do not have a single word to address to you; for when men come to their elders and have no intention of doing what they hear, God takes away from the elders the grace to speak so that they find nothing to say.”

## 5.2 Personal Causes of Omission or Refusal

There are some people who spurn preaching in obedience to the devil, for the evil spirit does not wish his followers to hear Jesus Christ preached for fear that they should be attracted to Him. It is for this reason that Mohammed

in his law ordered the Saracens not to listen to Christian preaching. "The reason why you do not hear," said Our Lord, "is that you are not of God" (John 8:47); "but," as He said earlier, "the father from whom you are is the devil" (John 8:44).

Some fail to profit from preaching through laziness, and will not suffer the slightest inconvenience in order to hear a sermon. Against them "the queen of the South will rise up in the judgment," according to St. Luke, "for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon" (Luke 11:31).

Others through pride disdain to humble themselves by mixing with common and simple folk at the feet of a preacher; but this scorn of the messengers of God reverts upon God Himself; the Saviour has said: "He who rejects you, rejects me" (Luke 10:16).

Others, foreseeing the reproach which their listening would incur, avoid listening to preaching. Conscious of their sins of usury, fornication or similar faults which preachers speak against, they are afraid to acknowledge their guilt and to avoid confusion they do not come to the sermon. St. John says, "For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, that his deeds may not be exposed" (John 3:20).

A great many permit themselves to be absorbed with their secular occupations as is written of Martha in the Gospel, whereas Mary Magdalene "seated herself at the Lord's feet, and listened to his word" (Luke 10:39), which action brought upon her the praises of the Master.

Others are deluded by an insane reasoning and tell themselves it is better to ignore what they ought to do, than to omit it after they have heard. Poor fools! They forget that their affected ignorance does not excuse them of sin; as St. Paul warns us: "if anyone ignores this, he shall be ignored" (I Cor. 14:38); that is to say, he shall be excluded from participation in the graces of the Church.

Others, again, fear that they will be obliged to do good if they go to a sermon, for the will to do good may be infused in them while they listen. "Their madness is according to the likeness of a serpent: like the deaf asp that stoppeth her ears: which will not hear the voice of the charmers; nor of the wizard that charmeth wisely" (Ps. 57:5, 6). They fear to see the poison of their venom neutralized by the word of the preacher.

Yet others have no taste for frequent preaching, and that which would be the proper food for their souls arouses their disgust, and yet they do not fail daily to partake of nourishment for the body. They are condemned by the

prophecy of Amos: “Behold the days come saith the Lord, and I will send forth a famine into the land: not a famine of bread nor a thirst of water, but of hearing the word of the Lord” (Amos 8:11), and of receiving consolation from it. These of whom we are speaking have the word in abundance but do not profit from it.

Some are obstinate in their malice, like the doctors of the Law and the Pharisees who hardened themselves against Jesus Christ, unwilling to be His disciples and even unwilling to be His hearers. “They made their heart as the adamant stone,” says the prophet Zacharias, “lest they should hear the law of God” (Zach. 7:12).

Others despair of ever profiting by the holy word because they feel that they have gained nothing, and so they refrain from coming to hear. They should remember that the word of the Lord is never heard without producing some fruit, sensible or not, present or future: “The word which has gone out from my mouth,” He says in Isaias, “shall not return to me empty” (Isai. 55:11).

Woe to those who act thus, for they have only to listen to the curse of the prophet Jeremias: “Cursed is the man that shall not hearken to the words of this covenant” (Jer. 11:3).

### 5.3 The Harmful Results of Omitting to Preach or of Refusing to Listen

Among the harmful results must be placed first of all the infidelity to religion which inevitably results; this is the reason why so many nations persist in their ancient errors. “How,” says St. Paul, “are they to believe him whom they have not heard? And how are they to hear if no one preachers?” (Rom. 10:14).

The next harmful consequence is a wrong way of life, and it is because of this that such a great number deceive themselves on what they must do, what they may do, and what is forbidden them; consequently they advance in the way of evil, having had no instruction by preaching. This is why one day they will repeat with the damned: “Therefore we have erred from the way of truth, and the light of justice hath not shined unto us” (Wisd. 5:6); or in other words, we have erred *because* the light of justice has not illuminated us. And what is this light if not preaching which shows us clearly what is

just and what is unjust?

Next, among the resultant evils, must be noted the lack of self-knowledge; for the word of the preacher is like to a mirror, in which, according to St. James the Apostle (Jas. 1:23), a man sees himself for what he is. And if there are such a great number of men who do not know the condition of their soul, the danger they run, and the sins into which they fall, it is because they have heard no preaching.

The foolish mistakes committed through a false evaluation of things must also be pointed out; for it is preaching that teaches the superiority of the spiritual over the corporal, the eternal over the temporal, and so on. This it is that those who have not been instructed usually do not have a proper sense of values. This is why the Book of Proverbs makes this recommendation: "Cease not, O my son, to hear instruction: and be not ignorant of the words of knowledge" (Prov. 19:27). These words of knowledge teach us to discern the value of each thing.

Also, we must mention a sterility for doing good as a sad result of an absence of preaching. Just as the absence of rain renders the land dry and unproductive of good fruit, so also when men are deprived of preaching, they stop producing the fruit of good works. "Where there is no knowledge of the soul, there is no good" (Prov. 19:2). This science of the soul is taught by the preacher, for this is his sole end, whereas other sciences have different and special ends.

And worst of all is that fertile condition for evil which results, for a land uncultivated and deprived of rain will not only produce no good fruits but will produce brambles, thorns, and weeds; thus sin increases when preaching ceases. "There is no knowledge of God," (which preaching propagates) "in the land," says Osee, and he immediately adds, "cursing, and lying, and killing, and theft and adultery have overflowed: and blood hath touched blood" (Osee 4:1-2).

We must also note as a sad consequence of the absence of preaching, the ravages committed by the enemies of the Church; for they prefer to attack lands where no voice is heard preaching. The prophet recommended the opposite of this when he said: "Let there be a trumpet in thy throat" (Osee 8:1); this trumpet, according to the gloss, is public preaching. Soon afterwards the prophet, wishing to give the reason for his advice, adds: "Like an eagle upon the house of the Lord" (Osee 8:1); that is, the eagle, the symbol of the devil, threatens to invade the house of God, if he is not put to flight by the outcries of the preacher.

Finally, slumbering in the midst of danger must be mentioned as a consequence of the absence of preaching. As Jonas slept in the bottom of the boat when his life was in danger, so also would the majority of men do if the preacher did not awake them from their torpor, as the pilot awoke Jonas saying to him: “Why art thou fast asleep? Rise up, call upon thy God” (Jonas 1:6). On this, St. Gregory has made the observation that, by a hidden and impenetrable judgment of heaven, the preaching of holy subjects is sometimes held from some perverted people, who are unworthy to be awakened by its grace.

## Chapter 6

# THE EFFECTS OF PREACHING

Let us remark on this point that preaching in certain cases produces no fruit, and that accidentally it may even happen that it produces bad fruit. Sometimes it produces what is not bad in itself, yet is not entirely good and can be corrupted, whereas in other cases it produces excellent results.

Therefore, firstly, we shall note why preaching remains unfruitful; secondly, what are the evil fruits that it produces; thirdly, what are those fruits which are not entirely good; fourthly, what are those which are perfectly good; fifthly, how preaching must be heard in order that it be fruitful; sixthly, how these instructions should be put in practice.

### 6.1 Causes of Sterility

One sees from time to time that there are sermons which, despite their number, produce no fruit; this is not astonishing since it sometimes happened even in the preaching of Our Lord Jesus Christ, as He said to St. John: "My word takes no hold among you" (John 8:37). The gloss on this subject teaches that the word is a hook and that it fails in its objective when it does not take from the heart of the auditors lust, murder, or any other sin, just as the hook is useless when it fails to take any fish from the water. But this fruitlessness sometimes occurs because of the hearers, for there are among them some who resemble the land which remains without any fruit although it is cultivated sufficiently. "When thou shalt till it," said the Lord to Cain,

“it shall not yield to thee its fruit” (Gen. 4:12).

At other times it will be the fault of the preacher, for a skillful farmer, by his work, will make a not too fertile land productive; while one who lacks the required knowledge fails to produce even from fertile land. So it may happen that the fruit of preaching dies in the heart of the listener, because the preacher is not solicitous. “I passed by the field of the slothful man,” the Book of Proverbs tells us, “and behold it was all filled with nettles” (Prov. 24:30,31)—the result of his sloth.

Sometimes it will be the nature of the sermon which renders it inefficacious; for some preachers in their discourses make use of authorities, or figures, or examples, which are so inapposite and absurd that they are unable to produce any effect on souls, like a diseased seed which cannot produce good fruit. When Seneca says is apropos: “We do not ask for many orators, but we need those who are useful.”

At other times sterility is caused by an absence of divine grace; for the seed cast upon the ground does not fructify without the rain and dew; in like manner, preaching does not profit those who hear it without the grace of the Holy Spirit. “If the Holy Spirit,” says St. Gregory, “does not help the listener, the sermon of the preacher is unavailing: and later on he repeats again: “Man is instructed by the word, when the soul is penetrated by the unction of the Holy Spirit.”

It may also happen that failure is the result of the snares of the enemy; for when the birds devour the train that has been sown, there is no fruit; likewise when the devil takes away the seed sown by the word, the effect is destroyed. Here we can see realized the words of the Master: “Those are they who have heard; then the devil comes, and takes away the word from their heart, that they may not believe and be saved” (Luke 8:12).

Thus, when preaching is unfruitful, it is because of the hearer, or the preacher, or because of the quality of the sermon preached, or the absence of grace, or the malice of the enemy.

But under another aspect we must note ten reasons which often hinder success. The first is hardness of heart, for there are some who have hearts “as hard as stone” (Job 41:15), and preaching does not produce in them any more fruit than the seed fallen upon a rock. This is why it is written in the Psalms: “Today if you shall hear his voice, harden not your hearts” (Ps. 94:8). The second reason is a foolishness of mind, for a fool who does not comprehend what is told him cannot draw any profit from it, having become like the ground where the seed does not take root. It is said in



Ecclesiasticus: “He speaketh with one that is asleep, who uttereth wisdom to a fool” (Ecclus. 22:9); he will not comprehend any more than any one who is deep in sleep. The third is excessive malice, like a multitude of brambles which prevent a field from yielding fruit as long as it is not cleared of them. “Casting aside,” says St. James, “abundance of malice, with meekness receive ingrafted word” (Jas. 1:21), as if to say: the word will be of no profit unless malice first of all be excluded from your hearts. The fourth is lack of opportunity, for thus says Ecclesiastes: “There is a time and opportunity for every business” (Eccles. 8:6), and one must bear this in mind for preaching to be profitable; for it is useless to sow in such and such a season. Ecclesiasticus says: “A parable coming out of a fool’s mouth shall be rejected: for he doth not speak it in due season” (Ecclus. 20:22). The fifth obstacle to success in preaching is what is known as animality, for if there are certain soils which are capable of raising barley, rye, and the common grains, but are unable to bear good wheat, so are their sensual men unfit to produce the spiritual fruits of preaching. “The sensual man,” says St. Paul, “does not perceive the things that are of the Spirit of God, for it is foolishness to him” (I Cor. 2:14); and if he does not perceive them how can he profit by them? The sixth is forgetfulness, for a forgetful man is like a broken vase which does not keep in the water. “The heart of a fool,” says Ecclesiasticus, “is like a broken vessel; and no wisdom at all shall it hold” (Ecclus. 21:17). And if it does not retain it, how will it draw any profit from it? The seventh is distaste for the divine word: St. Gregory,<sup>1</sup> says: “The nourishment of the soul is the word of God, but if one is not careful to keep it in the memory, it will be like food that the stomach vomits forth. And when one is not able to retain nourishment, his life is despaired of.” The eighth is secular business. “These are they,” says the Lord, “who are choked by the cares of life and their fruit does not ripen” (Luke 8:14). The ninth is disobedience in regard to the word of God. Men do not listen, says St. Augustine,<sup>2</sup> with the spirit of obedience, to the instructions of those who are the first to transgress them, and so they condemn both the word of God and those who preach it. The tenth obstacle to the success of preaching is the bad disposition of those to whom God is a stranger, and there are very many like this. “My sheep,” says St. John, “hear my voice, and follow me,” but he had said previously, “a stranger they will not follow because they do not know the voice of strangers” (John 10:27,

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<sup>1</sup>S. Greg., in *Homil.* 15, in *Evang.*

<sup>2</sup>S. Aug. *De doctrina Christi*, 27, lib. 5.

5).

## 6.2 Causes Which Render Preaching Injurious

On this subject we must remember that there are many who hear the word of God, but do not do it. "My people," said the Lord to Ezechiele: "sit before thee and hear thy words and do them not" (Ezech. 33:31). And thus, because of their disobedience, the fruit offered in preaching only does them harm.

In some cases they do not completely believe what is told them of future punishments, rewards, and other such-like truths. "They believed not," said the Psalmist, "his word and they murmured in their tents" (Ps. 105:24, 25). Such are those who say: "How can this or that be true?" And thus it is that with them preaching results in the vice of incredulity.

At other times what is preached displeases them: "The luxurious man," says Ecclesiasticus, "hath heard it" (the word) "and it shall displease him" (Ecclus. 21:18). And among them arises an aversion to good.

Sometimes they scorn what is taught them. "They despised his words" (II Par. 26:16), says Paralipomenon, and likewise one reads in the Book of Proverbs: "Fools despise wisdom and instruction" (Prov. 1:7). Consequently, preaching only produces in these men a scorn for the mysteries of God.

In some cases they go so far as to ridicule the truths that are proposed to them, like those of whom it is written: "They mocked the messengers of God and misused the prophets" (II Par. 36:16). And so for them all that results from preaching is a derision for the servants of God.

In other cases they hate the preacher because he opposes the unruly will of men. "I have hated Micheas son of Jemla," said Achab, "because he has prophesied not good but evil" (II Kings 22:8). For these people preaching is only the source of a hatred for those whom they ought to love.

There are men who not only hate the preachers but cruelly persecute them, as seen in the case of the Jews with regard to the Apostles: "Behold," said the Lord to them, "I send you prophets; and some of them you will put to death, and some you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from town to town" (Matt. 23:34). These men are the weeds that the devil has sown among the good grain, and which will be cast into the flames at the end of time. "Lord," the Apostles will say to the Divine Master concerning

these, “didst thou not sow good seed in thy field? How then does it have weeds?” and He will answer them: “An enemy has done this”; then He will add: “Gather up first the weeds, and bind them in bundles to burn” (Matt. 13:27,28,30). These men are also figured by the thorns and thistles of uncultivated soil, of which it is written: “For an earth that drinks in the rain . . . but that which brings forth thorns and thistles is worthless, and is nigh unto a curse, and its end is to be burnt!” (Heb. 6:7, 8).

We also find them symbolized in the vine carefully cultivated by the master, who expects a vine full of sweetness, but receives only bitterness. To them may be applied the words of Deuteronomy: “Their grapes are grapes of gall, and their clusters most bitter, their wine is the gall of dragons, and the venom of asps which is incurable.” Let us also note how terrible is the punishment: “Are not these things,” says the Lord, “stored up with me, and sealed up in my treasures? Revenge is mine, and I will repay them in due time” (Deut. 32:32,34,35). For these the only fruit that preaching brings is damnation and eternal fire.

### **6.3 Causes Which Spoil the Good That Preaching Produces**

It may sometimes happen that preaching produces certain fruits good enough in themselves, but in spite of this, do not have a good effect. We note, first of all, the understanding of truth. “The declaration of thy words,” says the Psalmist, “giveth light: and giveth understanding to little ones” (Ps. 118:130); but what good is understanding to those who do not bear good fruits? St. James answers: “Therefore, he who knows how to do good, and does not do it, commits a sin” (Jas. 4:17).

Next, let us note the pleasure found in preaching; for there are some who listen eagerly to preaching, as one listens to harmonious music. “And thou are to them,” says Ezechiel, “as a musical song which is sung with a sweet and agreeable voice” (Ezech. 33:32). But how many of these merit the reproach of the Gospel of not being moved by beautiful words? “We have piped to you,” it is written, “and you have not danced” (Matt. 11:17); for the one should follow the other. The Psalmist also said: “Rejoice in the Lord and exult” (Ps. 31:11); in other words, “rejoice outwardly while performing the works of the just.”

We must also consider emotion. Preaching moves some to contrition, like those of whom it is written: “Now on hearing this they are pierced to the heart” (Acts 2:37). Men become contrite because of fear, as Felix who “became alarmed” (Acts 24:25) upon hearing St. Paul; or because of some good resolution, as the Athenians who said to the Apostle: “We will hear thee again on this matter” (Acts 17:32); or because of some other pious affection, as we find in the Book of Psalms, where the author says to God: “Thy lightnings enlightened the world: the earth shook and trembled” (Ps. 76:19). By lightnings is understood preachers. But all this is of little importance to some people for as soon as the sermon is ended their ardor departs, as a boiling kettle cools when it is taken off the fire. This type of emotion is not sufficient for salvation. “The Lord is not in the earthquake” (III Kings 19:11), says the book of Kings. And it is to be noted that these three effects of preaching (understanding, pleasure, and emotion) correspond to three faculties of our heart.

Let us note also the judgment of those—and they are numerous—who keenly appreciate sermons and who speak in this manner: “The sermon was well delivered, or its delivery was poor, it was too long, or it was too short, it was too subtle, or it was trite,” and like expressions. “Doth not the ear,” says Job, “discern words?” (Job 12:11.) But of what value are words? Are they not so much straw? Those, then, who get only words from a sermon resemble a field in which is found only straw. But it is said in Jeremias: “What hath the chaff to do with the wheat?” (Jer. 23:28).

The next example of unproductive fruit are the eulogies or admiration given to preachers, like that of “the woman who hearing Jesus speak to the crowd lifted up her voice and said to Him: ‘Blessed is the womb that bore thee and the breasts that nursed thee’” (Luke 11:27). But to show that this admiration was of no avail if His teaching was not followed, Our Lord replied: “Rather, blessed are they who hear the words of God and keep it” (Luke 11:28).

Let us note also the knowledge required to preach. It is this that some seek in sermons; they wish to learn so that, in turn, they may preach to others; but this is not very useful to them, for one does not preach for his own benefit. “Thou therefore who teachest another,” said St. Paul, “but you do not teach yourselves” (Rom. 2:21). These last three fruits consist only in words, which have little value: “The kingdom of God is not in words, but in power” (I Cor. 4:20).

So, too, we note the making of good resolutions; for if the word of God is

called a seed, it is because it has the power to germinate good resolutions. But there are only too many who conceive but do not give birth; their conception will be of little avail, and it is of them that it is written: “The children are come to the birth; and the woman on travail hath not strength” (IV Kings 19:3).

We should note as one of the benefits of preaching, the request for advice; to have made the audience see this is to contribute to their salvation. This is what the Jews “were pierced to the heart at the words of St. Peter, and said to him and the other Apostles: ‘Brethren, what shall we do?’” (Acts 2:37.) But there are many who seek advice but do not follow it; and so the advice is of little use to them, as it is not much good to an invalid to have a doctor’s prescription if it is not filled out and used. This is what the Philosopher remarked, and what also the Book of Proverbs says: “Then shall they call upon me, and I will not hear,” and the reason is added: “Nor consented (they) to my counsel” (Prov. 1:28, 30).

Finally, we note an endeavor to do good; but there are some who do not persevere in what they have begun. “And these,” according to St. Luke, “believe for a while and in the time of temptation fall away” (Luke 8:13). They will not attain salvation which is reserved only for those who persevere.

These last three abortive fruits have been about good conceived, advised, begun, but not persevered in.

## 6.4 The Good Results of Preaching

Among the results of preaching there are ten which are entirely perfect.

The first is the conversion of infidels to the faith. A memorable example of this is the preaching of the Apostles and disciples which converted the whole world. The Acts tell us: “But some of them were Cyprians and Cyreneans, who on reaching Antioch began to speak to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord.” (Acts 11:20).

The second is the repentance of sinners. Thus St. Luke says, “The men of Nineve repented at the preaching of Jonas” (Luke 11:32).

The third is the humiliations willingly suffered by those who were once very worldly. Many, after hearing the word of God, have given up luxury to lead a humble life. Thus it was that “when Achab had heard these words” (of the prophet Elias) “he rent his garments, and put haircloth upon his flesh,

and fasted and slept in sackcloth, and walked with his head cast down” (III Kings 21:27).

The fourth is the confession of sins; for the word of the preacher has caused many to confess what they never dared to make known. When St. John the Baptist preached, “there went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan, confessing their sins” (Matt. 3:5-6).

The fifth good effect of preaching is the reception of the Holy Spirit who, during sermons, communicates Himself to a large number. “While Peter was still speaking these words,” says the Acts, “the Holy Spirit came upon all who were listening to his message” (Acts 10:44).

The sixth is the sanctification of sinners, for the power of sanctification lies in the word of God; this is why Jesus Christ says this prayer: “Sanctify them in the truth. Thy word is truth” (John 17:17), and again: “You are already clean because of the word that I have spoken to you” (John 15:3).

The eighth<sup>3</sup> is the deliverance of those who were enslaved by Satan. “Out of his teeth I took away the prey” (Job 29:17); the prey signifies the victim of the devil snatched away by preaching.

The ninth is the joy of the angels, who delight on knowing how preaching spreads the glory of Jesus Christ through the world. This is why the spouse of the Canticle, who is none other than Jesus Christ, said: “Thou that dwellest in the gardens, the friends hearken; make me hear thy voice” (Cant. 8:13). According to the gloss these friends are the angels; and the proof that they delight in preaching is the attention with which they hearken to it.

The tenth is the rout of the army of the demons, for preaching has deprived the devil of a great number of souls, as one may read in the Book of Judges: “And the three hundred men (of Gedeon) nevertheless persisted sounding the trumpets. And the Lord sent the sword into all the camp (of the Madians), and they killed one another” (Judges 7:22). This has been interpreted as the work of preachers as they preach the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity.

## 6.5 Why we Should Listen to Preaching

This section falls under two questions: the first, why is it necessary to listen willingly to preaching? the second, how should we listen to it?

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<sup>3</sup>The seventh good effect of preaching is missing in the French translation.

The dignity of the preacher should, first of all, inspire a desire to hear the word of God. For we prefer to listen to one who has authority or wisdom or such qualities. But the preacher speaks not as a man or as one concerned with profane sciences, but as inspired by God. Our Lord said of preachers: "He who hears you, hears me" (Luke 10:16). They are as it were His mouth and the words which they speak come from him; and this is why the prophets repeated so often at the end of their discourse: "Thus speaks the Lord," in other words: "Be attentive for these are not our words, but the words of God which we speak to you."

The matter contained in the word of God should also claim our attention; for the subject of the preacher is not at all mediocre or despicable, but of great importance, equal to any subject which man willingly gives his full attention to; this is why the Book of Proverbs says: "Hear, for I will speak of great things" (Prov. 8:6). The utility of the word should also merit our attention. In truth, words taken from human law are useful for the defense of temporal goods, those taken from medicine for the conservation of bodily health, those from philosophy for the acquisition of sciences; but the words of preaching are for the good of souls. If we willingly receive advice which contributes to our bodily health, how much more ought we to pursue what has for its object the salvation of the soul? This led St. James to say: "With meekness receive the ingrafted word, which is able to save your souls" (Jas. 1:21).

Another reason is our natural instinct. The lamb and small chicken run at the sound of their mother's call, as do many other animals. Man should also do the same at the sound of the voice of his Creator. "He who is of God hears the words of God" (John 6:47). Another reason is found in the frequency of sacred exhortations which urge us to listen to the Lord. How often do we find in Solomon, in David, in the prophets, and in all the sacred books the words: "Hear! Hear!" In regard to this St. James admitted no excuse. "Let every man," he says, "be swift to hear" (Jas. 1:19).

Another reason is the example of the primitive Church, which followed John the Baptist and Jesus even into the desert, as is related in the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. John.

Another reason is the particular grace concealed in certain sermons. It is the Lord, says the Psalmist, "who declareth his word to Jacob," and he adds: "He hath not done in like manner to every nation" (Ps. 147:19). Woe to the one who repulses such a grace; for by so doing he deprives himself of salvation. "Since you reject it," (the word of God) said Paul and Barnabas to the Jews at Antioch, (you) "judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life" (Acts

13:46).

A final reason for listening is the recompense which the teacher distributes to his listeners. In other schools it is the students who pay the master; there, on the contrary, he gives to them, and what he gives is priceless; for who can say how great or how numerous are the gifts that God bestows on the hearers of His word? Thus eternal Wisdom has said: "Blessed is the man that heareth me, and that watcheth daily at my gates, and waiteth at the posts of my doors" (Prov. 8:34).

Since so many reasons urge us to listen to the word of God, it is with cause that Jeremias cried out thrice: "O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord" (Jer. 22:29).

About the manner of hearing the word, we note first of all that some become sad when they are told to go to a sermon, whereas they ought to cry out with the Psalmist: "I will rejoice at thy words," my God, "as one that hath found great spoil" (Ps. 118:162).

Sometimes they come reluctantly, different from that "Very great crowd" which hastened "from every town" to hear our Lord, and from the people which "came to him early in the morning in the temple, to hear him" (Luke 21:38).

Others leave before the sermon is finished, like those of whom it is written in the prophecy of Zacharias: "but they would not hearken: and they turned away the shoulder to depart" (Zasch. 7:11). By this act they deprive themselves not only of indulgences and prayers which follow the sermon, but also of the best part of the sermon which the preacher holds until the end; for the fruits of preaching depend more on the conclusion than on the beginning, as is the case in every good word. Ecclesiastes says: "Better is the end of a speech than the beginning" (Eccles. 7:9).

Some never stop moving, sometimes they stand, then they sit, or they leave and then re-enter. Showing no desire to listen they do not take the trouble to find a place in order to hear and understand better the words of the preacher. It is against these that St. Augustine<sup>4</sup> cries out, saying: "He who negligently listens to the word of God is no less culpable, than he who through negligence allows the Sacred Host containing the body of Our Lord Jesus Christ to fall to the ground." Others will not remain quiet although silence is requested of the congregation. "The Levites," says Nehemias, "made silence among the people to hear the law" (II Esd. 8:7); likewise in the Acts of the

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<sup>4</sup>S. Aug., *Homil.*, 27, lib. 5



Apostles we read that “Paul arose, and motioning with his hand for silence, said ‘Israelites and you who fear God, hearken’” (Acts 13:16).

There are others who disturb the congregation by walking up or down through the people, or moving about, or annoy the audience in some manner. They would do well to obey Ecclesiasticus who said of them: “Be meek to hear the word of God” (Ecclus. 5:13). For as an animal naturally peaceful does not disturb another by biting it, or striking it or any other such thing, so the listener ought to conduct himself in such a manner that everyone can listen to the sermon in peace.

There are some who are completely occupied in prayer, or in reading, or in something else during the sermon, and consequently pay no attention to what is said. They ought to listen carefully to the word of God, as is recommended in the Book of Psalms: “Attend, O my people, to my Law” (Ps. 77:1); and as is shown in the Acts: “And the crowds with one accord gave heed to what was said by Philip” (Acts 8:6).

Others listen with boredom when they should be greedy and desirous for the word of God, as is written of the nobles of Beroea: “They received the word with great eagerness” (Acts 12:11).

The reason given for boredom is that the sermon is too long. We should recall the example of the Jews, to whom “Esdras read it (the law of Moses) from the morning until midday, before the men, and the women, and all those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the book” (II Esd. 8:3), yet no one was discouraged by this long discourse! This example shows us how much attention we should pay to preaching.

Certain people quickly become impatient when they hear something that displeases them; but it is then that patience is necessary. This is why St. Paul said to Agrippa: “I beg thee therefore to listen to me with patience” (Acts 26:3).

Others while listening to the word of God show no sign of devotion. How different from Mary “who also seated herself at the Lord’s feet and listened to his word” (Luke 10:39). Thus, she realized what St. Bernard said: “The word of God should be heard devoutly.”

To sum up, those who wish to hear the word of God properly would receive it with joy, come to it with eagerness, stay to the end of the sermon, and listen with avidity, patience and piety.

## 6.6 How it Should be Put Into Practice

Let us remark first of all that those who come to hear the word of God and do not put it into practice, draw down upon themselves a great many evils.

The first is that they change a good into an evil, for the knowledge of what is right, a thing excellent in itself, becomes evil for them. St. Peter says: "For it were better for them not to have known the way of justice, than having known it, to turn back from that holy commandment delivered to them" (II Peter 2:21).

There is also an increase in the seriousness of the sin for a man who knows what he ought to do yet does not do it; he is more to blame than the man who does not know nor do what he ought. St. Luke says: "But that servant who know his master's will, and did not make ready for him and did not act according to his will, will be beaten with many stripes" (Luke 12:47).

Another evil incurred is a loathsomeness which falls on the sinner who knows the hatefulness of his sin yet does not try to purify himself of his filth. For this sinner is more detestable than the one who does not see his own sins. St. James says: "For if anyone is a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like a man looking at his natural face in a mirror; for he looks at himself and goes away, and presently he forgets what kind of a man he is" (Jas. 1:23).

Yet another evil falling on those who hear the word of God but fail to do it is the foolishness of all that they do for the Lord said: "Everyone who hears these my words and does not act upon them, shall be likened to a foolish man who builds his house on sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against the house, and it fell, and was utterly ruined" (Matt. 7:26,27).

An even greater evil is the fact that there is cause to despair for the return of the soul to life, as one despairs for the life of a man whose stomach cannot retain food. The Psalmist said: "Their soul abhorred all manner of meat: and they drew nigh even to the gates of death" (Ps. 106:18). For the word of God is the food of the soul and the life of him who cannot retain this nourishment is indeed without hope.

To be condemned by God is the most terrible evil of all. Jesus said: "And if anyone hear my words, and do not keep them, it is not I who judge him; the word that I have spoken will condemn him on the last day" (John 12:47,48), that is to say, that it will be the cause of his damnation. This is why He said on another occasion: "Come to terms with thy opponent quickly" (which is the word of God, when it is in contradiction to our conduct) "while thou art

with him on the way; lest thy opponent deliver thee to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and thou be cast into prison" (Matt. 5:25).

We must now note the good assured to whoever does the word of God as soon as it is heard. First is the admission into the ranks of the disciples of Jesus Christ. It is not sufficient in order to be a disciple of such a Master, to have hung upon His word, as it suffices in the case of other masters; but one must also practice what He teaches, as he has said: "If you abide in my word, you shall be my disciples indeed" (John 8:31). Furthermore, He bestows on us the favor of becoming His friends. "He who has my commandments," known through preaching, "and keeps them, he it is who loves me" (John 14:21). Better still and more desirable, we become His brother. He said, "My brethren, are they who hear the word of God and act upon it" (Luke 8:21).

They who do the word of God receive the blessing of God. St. Paul said: "For the earth that drinks in the rain that often falls upon it, and produces vegetation that is of use to those by whom it is tilled, receives a blessing from God" (Heb. 6:7). They place their salvation outside the realm of doubt for "it is not they who hear the Law that are just in the sight of God; but it is they who follow the Law that will be justified" (Rom. 2:13).

Finally, they will receive the blessing spoken by Jesus: "Blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it" (Luke 3:23).

Conclusion.—Everything that has just been said shows that great evils befall those who hear the word of God without keeping it; whereas priceless blessings are assured to those who hear it and put it into practice. Everyone therefore ought to take all possible care to practice faithfully these instructions.

## Chapter 7

# DIVERSE SUBJECTS CONNECTED WITH PREACHING

There are eight subjects connected with preaching: first, traveling; second, conduct when one is among men; third, manner of conversing familiarly with men; fourth, living with strangers; fifth, participation in secular affairs; sixth, advice to be given to those who seek it; seventh, hearing of confessions; eight, the prefaces of sermons or of conferences.

### 7.1 Travelling: Biblical Figures

The travels that a preacher ought to make are figured and praised by the Scriptures in many ways. Some preachers are slow to undertake them and must be aroused; others act imprudently and must be admonished; while many are deserving of praise and should be imitated.

We begin, then, by explaining the figures which have reference to these journeys, then we shall give the reasons for making them, and what may be found blameworthy and what praiseworthy in them.

The first of the biblical figures is furnished by the clouds along the way, sometimes toward the west, or the east, or the south, or the north, becoming in every place the manifestation of the grandeur of God. It is written “By his magnificence the clouds run hither and thither” (Deut. 33:26). According to the gloss this magnificence is realized by preaching.

The second figure is manifest in the flash of lightning: “The Lord,” says Exodus, “sent lightning running along the ground” (Exod. 9:23). St. Gregory tells us that the lightning furrows the sky when the preacher, by the brilliance of his miracles, penetrates the hearts of those who hear him with the fear of the Lord.

The third figure is given us in the heavenly creatures who were shown to Ezechiel, going and coming, signifying preachers. The prophet said: “This was the vision running to and fro” (Ezech. 1:13); that is of being in action.

A fourth figure is to be found in the strong horses of which of which the prophet Zacharias said that they “went out and sought to go and run to and fro through all the earth” (Zach. 6:7). These horses, according to the gloss, are the preachers of whom God asks the question in the Book of Job: “Wilt thou give strength to the horse or clothe his neck with neighing?” (Job 39:19.)

The fifth figure is that of the travels of the royal envoys of whom the Book of Esther speaks: “And these letters which were sent in the king’s name were sealed with his ring, and sent by posts: who were to run through all the provinces, to prevent the former letters with new messages” (Esth. 8:10); and the gloss applies these verses to the activity of preachers.

Finally, a sixth figure is found in the movement of the soldiers mentioned in the Book of the Maccabees: “And it came to pass that through the whole city of Jerusalem for the space of forty days there were seen horsemen running in the air, in gilded raiment and armed with spears, like bands of soldiers” (II Mach. 5:2). This is the mysterious symbol of preachers who for all time are consecrated to repentance and who go and preach throughout the whole Church.

## **7.2 Preachers Traveling: Encouragement of Apostolic Journeys**

It is necessary to remark that in spite of the fact that Scripture call the preacher a “foot” because of his manner of traveling, there are some who, because of laziness (or for one of the other reasons enumerated in section 4.2 where we treated of the frivolous pretexts which hinder preaching), are reluctant to set out on their ministry and need to be spurred on.

The considerations for making Apostolic journeys are many. The first is

the advice given them in Scripture. The Book of Proverbs says: “Run about, make haste, stir up thy friend” (Prov. 6:3). Is not the preacher the friend of man and ought he not to arouse them from slumber?

The second consideration is to be found in the excellent examples which are given them; for Christ as soon as He began to preach, had no place on which to lay His head. He went from city to city and from village to village, preaching everywhere in Galilee (Matt. 4 and Mark 6).

No more than their Master, the Apostles had no home where they could rest peacefully; they traveled across the world and preached everywhere (Mark 16). When, then, is to be thought of those preachers who are content to remain in their homes or in their cloisters?

The third consideration for traveling is the ardor of their adversaries which ought to provoke preachers to emulate them. The Pharisees, says St. Matthew, traversed land and sea to gain proselytes (Matt. 23:15); heretics, at the risk of their lives, go into all places and enter into houses and into the countryside in order to pervert souls, like the three hundred foxes of Samson (Judges 15). “The devil, as a raging lion, goes about seeking someone to devour” (I Peter 5:8). How shameful, then, in the face of such enemies who labor for the damnation of souls, are certain preachers who refuse to take one step to save the soul of another.

The fourth is found in the nature of their office which does not consist in remaining in one place but in traveling wherever good<sup>1</sup> calls them. “I have appointed you that you should go” (John 15:16), to all places, said Our Lord to the Apostles and through them to every preacher of the Gospel.

The fifth reason for traveling is the need that men have of assistance. In fact, man naturally runs to the help of those in danger; this is why it was said to the angels who symbolize preachers: “Go, ye swift angels, to a nation expecting and trodden under foot” (Isai. 18:2).

The sixth consideration is found in the expressed wish of Him who sends preachers; and on this point the will of the Lord is immovable and He will not hear of dispensation, even because of persecution. He told them: “Go, behold I send you forth as lambs in the midst of wolves” (Luke 10:3).

The seventh is the eloquent example of those engaged in secular affairs; they do not stop for a moment during their entire life, but travel everywhere in order to heap up riches. This is what the Apostles did in the spiritual order, when they journeyed through many lands, gaining souls for God. What will

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<sup>1</sup>Perhaps “God”; I have no original to check. *Transcriber*

those servants say on the day of judgment, to whom Our Lord had said: “Trade till I come” (Luke 19:13), and who like the slothful man have hidden the money received from the Master, making no attempt to derive benefit from it? St. Gregory commenting on the verse: “Behold the judge arrives,” poses the same question in these words: What fruit shall we then show for our labors? Before the supreme Judge “Peter will appear with converted Judea, Paul leading, so to speak, the entire world; then Andres with Achaia, John with Asia, Thomas with India. What shall we say, we unfortunate ones, who after the business has been confided to our care, shall appear before the Lord with empty hands.”<sup>2</sup>

### 7.3 The Preacher on a Journey: Things to Avoid

On this point let us note that there are some preachers who, from sheer frivolity, are ever ready to travel. The words of Jeremias can be applied to them: “Thus saith the Lord to this people, that have loved to move their feet” (Jer. 14:10), which he finds reprehensible, for he adds: “and have not pleased the Lord.” Indeed, as Seneca has said, to remain within oneself is the proof of a wise soul, and one’s inclinations are manifest in one’s behavior.

Some are always eager to travel to get away from the discipline of the cloister, like children who run away from school. Sara, who is the symbol of the religious state, “afflicted her (Agar) and she ran away.” But the angel of the Lord said to her: “Return to thy mistress, and humble thyself under her hand” (Gen. 16:6, 9).

Others, slaves to their stomachs, finding the table of their convent too frugal, become like the dogs of which the psalmist speaks: “Who shall suffer hunger: and shall go round about the city” (Ps. 58:15). They also resemble the goliards<sup>3</sup> who wandered from house to house for much the same reason. The Lord said to His disciples: “Do not go from house to house,” looking for nourishments, but, “remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they have” (Luke 10:7).

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<sup>2</sup>St. Greg., in *Homil. Designavit*.

<sup>3</sup>Goliards were wandering students, who during festivals passed from castle to castle, from convent to convent, singing or reciting their poetry; their love of good living and their unquenchable thirst were renowned; their songs, sometimes erotic, made them suspect by the Church which prohibited them from singing the Office

Others, moved by natural affection, wish to be always visiting some one of their relatives. The lives of the Fathers of the desert offer them this lesson: A brother, it is said, having learned that his mother had come to visit him, refused to receive her and had her told that he was content to see her in the next world. Does not the psalmist say: "Forget thy people and thy father's house?" (Ps. 44:11.) Why, then, do we visit so often those whom we ought to forget?

And again, some who are preoccupied with temporal affairs such as wills and the like forget the advice of Paul to Timothy: "No one serving as God's soldier entangles himself in worldly affairs, that he may please him whose approval he has secured" (II Tim. 2:4).

Others travel out of curiosity, wishing to see this or that, to investigate or to listen to what is none of their business, like the women of whom St. Paul said: "And further, being idle, they learn to go about from house to house, and are not only idle but gossipers as well and busybodies, mentioning things they ought not" (I Tim. 5:13). They are of the company of those monks whom St. Benedict called aimless vagabonds and whom he disliked so much.

Others are the victims of imprudent prelates, who are continually sending their charges everywhere, exposing them to considerable danger. "My people," said the Lord through Jeremias, "have been a lost flock, their shepherds have caused them to go astray, and have made them wander in the mountains: they have gone from mountain to hill, they have forgotten their resting place" (Jer. 50:6).

Others, and this is worse still, disregarding obedience, go where they have not been sent by their superiors. "I did not send prophets, yet they ran" (Jer. 23:20). Sometimes, contrary to the rule under which they have made profession, they travel on horseback, or take money with them, or commit similar offenses, forgetful that Our Lord commanded His disciples to carry nothing with them on the way, not even a staff (Matt. 10:9). They travel without rhyme or reason and they produce nothing of good by their journeys, whereas it is written: "I have appointed you that you should go and bear fruit" (John 15:16).

In bringing this article to a close, let us note that there are three evils resulting from too much traveling, which befall religious preachers.

The first is a distaste that arises in the faithful; for it is a fact that excess begets distaste as the Book of Proverbs tells us: "Withdraw thy foot from the house of thy neighbor, lest having his fill he hate thee" (Prov. 25:17).

The second is the spiritual harm which the preacher lays himself open to;



for it is exceedingly difficult to remain for a long time among seculars without suffering harm. Seneca himself said: “Every time I have been among men, I have gone from them less a man.”

The third is the discredit that comes to his ministry; for usually what is seen a great many times becomes less appreciated. As Our Lord said: “No prophet is acceptable in his own country” (Luke 4:24), because he has lived there too long a time and has been seen too often.

Let us conclude that every excess in this matter must be avoided, even though there should be a reason for traveling.

## 7.4 The Preacher on a Journey: Laudable Practices to be Observed

For voyages to be worthy of praise, they ought to have seven conditions.

The first is the ability of the travelers to preach; for everyone is not called to the apostolic ministry. That is why Our Lord said to the Apostles: “But what here in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49).

The second is the intention to produce spiritual good, following the example of St. Paul who said to the Romans: “. . . always imploring in my prayers that somehow I may at last by God’s will have a prosperous journey to get to you. For I long to see you that I may impart some spiritual grace unto you to strengthen you” (Rom. 10:11).

The third is the security which obedience adds; for this reason Isaias, although he wished to go to the people, asked that he be sent under obedience: “Lo here am I, send me” (Isai. 6:8).

The fourth is vigilance, for a traveler if he does not take care will easily lose his possessions either through the connivance of his enemies, or through some chance happening, or by any other cause; thus speaks St. Paul: “See to it therefore, brethren, that you walk with care” (Eph. 5:15).

The fifth is that continually, whether on the road, or in a house with a few, or publicly in a crowd, the preacher should be preoccupied with the good to be done. “Casting their seeds,” the Psalmist has said, not only when they were stationary, but when “Going, they went and wept” (Ps. 125:6).

The sixth is to moderate the fatigue of the journey for there are some who travel such a great distance before stopping that they are unable, when

they arrive at their destination, either to celebrate Holy Mass, or recite the Divine Office reverently, or preach properly, or do anything else but sleep. It is to correct these that Ezechiel described the heavenly animals which symbolize preachers: “The sole of their foot was like the sole of a calf’s foot” (Ezech. 1:7), whose step is very limited.

The seventh is to devote oneself continually to prayer during the journey, as David who did not cease from repeating: “Direct my way in thy sight” (Ps. 5:9). Also, good religious have the habit of reciting every day certain special prayers for the success of their journey.

When the preacher arrives at the end of the voyage and has to remain among seculars, he must watch his conduct; and concerning this we must discuss:

- Firstly, why the preacher must conduct himself well?
- Secondly, what are the conditions of good conduct?
- Thirdly, how can it be kept?

## 7.5 The Necessity of Conducting Oneself Well

First of all, it is the duty of a preacher to live in such a way that he glorifies God, not only by his words, but also by his example, as the Divine Master commanded the first preachers, saying to them: “Even so let your light shine before men, in order that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:16), and this is what produces good conduct. “Behave yourselves honorably among the pagans,” says St. Peter, “that, whereas they slander you as evildoers, they may through observing you by reason of you good works God in the day of visitation” (I Peter 2:12).

Secondly, the duty of the preacher is to use all the means at his disposal for the salvation of souls; but he will obtain this result better by edifying conduct than by speech. For St. Peter tells us: “In like manner also let wives be subject to their husbands; so that even if any do not believe the word, they may without word be won through the behavior of their wives” (I Peter 3:1). If, then, good conduct is so efficacious in a lay woman, how much more will it be in the preacher who adds to it the authority of his word?

Thirdly, it is also his duty to help the sick, not only by his words and prayers, but also by the merit which results from his good conduct and

which brings such great consolation to the sick. Ecclesiasticus says, “And they (physicians) shall beseech the Lord, that he would prosper what they give for ease and remedy, for their conversation” (Ecclus. 38:14). This can be applied not only to physicians of the body, but also to those of the soul.

Fourthly, they must also be a credit to their apostolate, following the example of the great Apostle who said to the Romans, “As long, indeed, as I am an apostle of the Gentiles, I will honor my ministry” (Rom. 11:13), that is, by a good life, and so he was able to say to the Corinthians: “We give no offense to anyone, that our ministry may not be blamed” (II Cor. 6:3). If our conduct shows that we do not practice what we preach, we will not be following the example of the Apostle and we will be justly held to account.

Fifthly, the duty of the preacher is, finally, to confound his adversaries; and this can best be done by a holy life. “Yet do so with gentleness and fear, having a good conscience so that wherein they who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame” (I Peter 3:16); and again: “For such is the will of God, that for doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish men” (I Peter 2:15).

Sixthly, but to silence them is not enough; we must change their heart, and only the example of a good life can produce this change. St. Paul said to Titus: “Show thyself in all things an example of good works, in teaching, in integrity and dignity; let thy speech be sound and blameless, so that anyone opposing may be put to shame, having nothing bad to say of us” (Tit. 2:7-8).

From what has been said, it is obvious that exemplary conduct glorifies God, is a means of saving souls, gives consolation to the sick, adds honor to preaching, and is a powerful weapon in the battle with the enemy. All these things must be realized by the preacher and in order to do so, even though he lives in the midst of the world, he must continually lead a good life.

## **7.6 The Conditions Necessary for Exemplary Conduct**

There are many things by which we can determine whether or not a preacher is leading a good life in the midst of the world.

First of all, his conduct must be good in the eyes of God, for although he might outwardly appear to be full of merit, if he is not pleasing in God’s sight he is a hypocrite. St. Paul defended himself against such a charge saying:

“And in this I too strive always to have a clear conscience before God” (Acts 24:16).

Secondly, it is necessary that his behavior be commendable not only before God and in secret, but also publicly in the eyes of men: “But be thou an example to the faithful,” and the Apostle to Timothy, “in speech, in conduct, in charity, in faith, in chastity” (I Tim. 4:12).

Thirdly, it is necessary, that this goodness of life be manifest in all things and not just apply to some of our actions. St. Paul says to the Hebrews: “For we are confident that we have a good conscience, desiring to live uprightly in all things” (Heb. 13:18), and also toward everyone. This is the reason why he says to the Romans, “To no man render evil for evil, but provide good things not only in the sight of God, but also in the sight of all men” (Rom. 12:17). He says boldly to the Corinthians: “For our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience that . . . in the grace of God—we have conducted ourselves in the world” (II Cor. 1:12). And not only “at one time” but “continually,” as the Acts of the Apostles say, where St. Paul makes this statement: “Brethren, I have conducted myself before God with a perfectly good conscience up to this day” (Acts 23:1). In the same vein St. Peter said: “Be you also holy in all your behavior” (I Peter 1:15); that is to say, in all things, in the eyes of all, in every place, and at all times.

Fourthly, it is necessary that your conduct be serious, for it is not fitting for a preacher to act in a frivolous or foolish manner. As St. Gregory remarks, the words of a preacher are not accepted when there is an appearance of levity in his manner.

Fifthly, it is necessary that he be resolute in his good conduct, for some, who in the beginning are good, but after they have been thrown in contact with the wicked, they begin to follow their ways; much like the chameleon which takes the color of that which it touches. Of these it is written in the Book of Psalms: “And they were mingled among the heathens and learned their works” (Ps. 105:35). Jeremias gives this advice to the Jews: “And if thou wilt separate the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth: thy salt be turned to thee, and thou shalt not be turned to them” (Jer. 15:19).

Sixthly, good conduct must be fruitful, because it is not fitting that a preacher remain idle among the people. He is bound always to labor to produce some good fruit, as did the Apostle who could say of himself: “Watch, therefore, and remember that for three years night and day I did not cease with tears to admonish every one of you” (Acts 20:31).

Seventhly, his conduct must not only be good but also pleasing and ami-

able, as it is written of Tobias: “And all his kindred, and all his generation continued in good life, and in holy conversation, so that they were acceptable both to God, and to men, and to all that dwelt in the land” (Tob. 14:17).

But for this amiability many conditions are requisite. One is wisdom in words. “A man wise in words,” says Ecclesiasticus, “shall make himself beloved” (Ecclus. 20:13).

Another is a willingness to help, for a philosopher has said, a service rendered leads the way to friendship. St. Paul was always at the service of others as he said to the Corinthians: “As I myself in all things please all men, not seeking what is profitable to myself but to the many” (I Cor. 10:33), as if to say: “It is by my eagerness to render service that I please all.”

Another is meekness in action: Ecclesiasticus has also said: “My son, do thy works in meekness, and thou shalt be beloved above the glory of men” (Ecclus. 3:19).

Another is respect for established customs. St. Paul was observed to conform to all things, as far as he reasonably could; for “every beast loveth its like” (Ecclus 13:19).

Another is humility in all one’s relations with others; for if it is indeed true that “pride is hateful before God and men” (Ecclus. 10:7), it will be equally true that humility will render the preacher lovable to all.

Another is tenderness and compassion; for nothing is more consoling to the sufferer than sympathy: “And he preserved for him men of mercy, that found grace in the eyes of all flesh,” Ecclesiasticus says, praising the heroes of the old Law (Ecclus. 44:27).

And finally, the evidence of virtue; for such is its power that wherever it shows itself, it makes itself loved. It is said of St. Sebastian that, since God had overwhelmed him with grace, he could not but be loved by everyone: and Cicero in his treatise on friendship also said that there is nothing which more surely wins our good-will.

## 7.7 Means Which Will Insure Good Conduct

It would be of little value to the preacher to know why he should conduct himself well, and what constitutes good conduct, if he did not conform his life to it; it is important, then, for him to see the means that will serve this end.

Firstly, he should consider the good examples he meets with; for a painter,

who would reproduce a beautiful scene, will be most successful if he examines it very closely. It is written in the Book of Proverbs: "And by the example received instruction" (Prov. 24:32). What a beautiful exemplar is the Son of God! St. Bernard said of Him: "O Good Jesus, how sweet it was for men to live near to you!" What a wonderful example is found in the great Apostle who could say to the priests of Ephesus: "You know what manner I have lived with you all the time since the first day that I came into the province of Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and tears and in trials that befell me because of the plots of the Jews; how I have kept back nothing that was for your good, but have declared it to you and taught you in public and from house to house" (Acts 20:18).

Another is the care with which the preacher should instruct himself, like the novice who, thanks to the instruction of his master on regular discipline, learns to practice what he formerly did not know how to do. This is what the Apostle impressed on his beloved disciple, saying: "I write these things to thee hoping to come to thee shortly, but in order that thou mayest know, if I am delayed, how to conduct thyself in the house of God, which is the Church of the living God." (I Tim. 3:14-15).

Another means towards the end of good conduct is found in the obeying of our legitimate superiors, and in good works; this may be observed in the servant to whom his master says: "Do this, and he does it" (Luke 7:8). And St. Paul commands Titus, his disciple, and also a preacher: "Show thyself in all things an example of good works, in teaching, in integrity and dignity" (Tit. 2:17).

Yet another is prudence. It is, in fact, this which teaches us to live well in the midst of a perverse and deceitful world. The Apostle, St. James, says: "Who is wise and instructed among you? Let him by his good behavior show his work in the meekness of wisdom" (Jas. 3:13).

Studious application is still another means, indeed, one of the most useful. A woman who wants to appear beautiful will take great pains in adorning herself. Virtuous men on their part should be as zealous as Ecclesiasticus says: "Studying beautifulness" (Ecclus. 44:16); that is to say, they should show zeal for a good life, and apply themselves especially to the exemplary conduct which befits the preacher.

We must also note the diligent effort necessary to keep unstained by the impurities of the world. To succeed in this, it is necessary to use extreme diligence. St. Peter, when speaking of the virtues which make for a holy life, said: "Do you accordingly on your part strive diligently to supply your faith

with virtue, your virtue with knowledge, your knowledge with self-control, your self-control with patience, your patience with piety, your piety with fraternal love, your fraternal love with charity” (II Peter 1:5-6).

And yet another means is the correction of our defective inclinations which ought to be cast aside, just as we throw off old clothes, and put on new. St. Paul says: “That as regards your former manner of life you are to put off the old man,” and a little further on, he adds: “and put on the new man, which has been created according to God in justice and holiness of truth” (Eph. 4:24).

Let us add, also, vigilance over oneself, for whoever does not keep a guard over himself when among the wicked will easily lose his virtue, like the traveler who loses his cloak in an inn frequented by thieves. The Apocalypse tells us: “Blessed is he who watches and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame” (Apoc. 16:15). In this text, the garments represent good conduct done in public.

Finally, let us mention the need to purify ourselves frequently from the stains which we contract; as one washes garments which have become soiled. Leviticus says: “If a man touch anything of men (the unclean) he shall wash his clothes” (Lev. 15:6), which are, as we have said, the symbol of exterior and visible conduct. Virtuous men should also examine their conscience frequently, and get from others their observations on their conduct in order that, if there appears to be anything wicked in them, they may be able to cleanse themselves by contrition, confession, and the amendment of their ways.

There are some preachers who are so reserved when not preaching that in their ordinary conversations they never say an edifying word, which is greatly to be deplored. There are, and this is worse still, those who chatter thoughtlessly in the manner of worldly people. Others, finally, maintain a happy medium between taciturnity and thoughtlessness, and edify all by their words; these last are much to be praised.

## **7.8 The Reproach Incurred by Those Whose Conversation is not Edifying**

About this class of preachers it ought to be remarked how little they conform to the model which Our Saviour Jesus Christ offers them; for His words were

not only edifying when He preached publicly but also when He conversed intimately. Thus He would sometimes talk while walking on the road as He did with the two disciples of Emmaus: "Beginning then with Moses and with all the prophets, he interpreted to them," writes St. Luke, "in all the Scriptures the things referring to himself." And so well did He do it that they afterwards said to themselves: "Was not our heart burning within us while he was speaking on the road and explaining to us the Scriptures?" (Luke 24:27, 32).

As other times while resting during the course of a journey, His words would edify His listeners as with the Samaritan woman; St. John says: "Jesus therefore, wearied as he was from the journey, was sitting at the well" (John 4:6); and he reports at length all the admirable words of the Saviour to that woman. And so it was with His companions on a journey. St. Matthew tells us He spoke to those who followed Him about the centurion: "Amen I say to you I have not found so great a faith in Israel. And I tell you many will come from the East and the West and will feast with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 8:10-11). He spoke in like manner to those who met Him on the way, as in the case of the ten lepers: "Go, show yourselves to the priests" (Luke 17:14). And again, in the houses where He was received with hospitality He spoke sometimes before the feast and while it was being prepared, as with Magdalen; "Who also seated herself at the Lord's feet and listened to his words" (Luke 10:39), while Martha was busy with the preparations. Sometimes during the feast itself, when "Observing they were choosing the first places at table, he said to them, 'When thou are invited to a wedding feast do not recline in the first place ...'" (Luke 14:7-8). Or He would speak after the feast as in the discourse after the Last Supper.

At all times His words edified those around Him, sometimes at night as with Nicodemus (John 3:2), sometimes during the day as with Nathaniel (John 1:48), or with the disciples as one may read in all the pages of the Gospel, or with His adversaries, as St. Luke tells us, addressing Himself to the Doctors of the Law and to the Pharisees (Luke 14:3).

He spoke thus not only before His death as He Himself observed when He said: "These are the words that I spoke to you while I was yet with you" (Luke 24:44), but also after His resurrection as St. Luke relates: "During forty days appearing to them and speaking to them of the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3).

And not only Christ has left us these examples, but also the preacher *par*



*excellence*, St. Paul, who said: “For three years night and day I did not cease with tears to admonish every one of you” (Acts 20:31).

We have, then, at all times, as models for intimate and edifying conversation our Saviour Jesus Christ and His great Apostle, St. Paul, whom every priest should imitate. St. Gregory says in one of his homilies:<sup>4</sup> “It is necessary, O priests, that all those whom you will meet receive from you the salt of the word: if you find that such a one is straying along the paths of lewdness, counsel him to moderate his passion, in order that by keeping a guard on himself in what is permissible he may refrain from what is forbidden. If you deal with a married man, teach him not to give himself up wholly to the things of the world, lest he place them above the love of God; and that in granting to his spouse what is her due, he will keep himself from displeasing his Creator. And if you meet a cleric, recommend to him that he lead a life which will be an example to the laity, lest the latter, noticing in him things worthy of reproach, will attribute them to our holy religion, and their esteem for it will be lessened. In the case of a monk, exhort him to show by his life, his actions, his words, and his thoughts, the respect which he has for his holy habit, and to show himself before God such as his monastic dress makes him appear in the eyes of the world. If you meet a man already virtuous, recall to him that he must advance still more in sanctity. If he is a sinner, admonish him to correct himself. And so whoever you meet shall receive from you the salt of holy words,” concludes St. Gregory.

This duty is imposed not only on priests, by on every Christian. Thus the greatest of the popes, St. Peter, said to the faithful: “If anyone speaks, let it be as with words of God” (I Peter 4:11); and the greatest of Doctors, St. Paul, wrote to the Ephesians: “Let no ill speech proceed from your mouth, but whatever is good for supplying what fits the current necessity, that it may give grace to the hearers” (Eph. 4:29.) How serious and urgent, then, is this duty of the preacher whose mission is to teach virtue, when the same obligation falls upon every priest, and even upon every Christian?

Besides, we should remember that a private conversation on virtue is usually more fruitful for our neighbor than a sermon addressed to a large assembly; this is true for two reasons: the first is that he discusses with each on what is most necessary to each, as a doctor prescribes much better when he visits his patient at his home and than he would do in a public lecture. Indeed, this is a truth which Ecclesiasticus recalls to us: “Treat not with a

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<sup>4</sup>St. Greg., *super Designavit*

man without religion concerning holiness, nor with an unjust man concerning justice, nor with a woman touching her of whom she is jealous, nor with a coward concerning war, nor with a merchant about traffic, nor with a buyer of selling, nor with an envious man with giving thanks, nor with the ungodly of piety, nor with the dishonest of honesty, nor with the field laborer of every work, nor with him that worketh by the hear of the finishing of the year, nor with an idle servant of much business" (Ecclus. 37:12-14).

The second reason is that, in these private conversations the words penetrate more profoundly, as an arrow shot straight at someone will hit him with greater force, than when it is shot haphazardly at many. This is why Tobias addressing himself familiarly to his son said to him: "Hear, my son, the words of my mouth, and lay them as a foundation in thy heart" (Tob. 4:2). To which his son replied: "I will do all the things, father, which thou has commanded me" (Tob. 5:1). But, I ask you, who has ever replied thus to the teaching received in a public discourse?

Let us remark also that these conversations can contribute to the good reputation of the speaker, for there is no greater proof that a man's heart is overflowing with God, than the pleasure which he takes in often speaking of Him. We judge the hearts of men by their words, says St. Gregory; and St. Isadore says also the tongue of a man reveals his character and his spirit is judged by the language he speaks. This is the reason why preachers who speak often of God are reputed as men of virtue and sanctity.

These conversations finally are a source of merit; for if a laborer, who works with his hands, earns more the more he uses them, so also the preacher acquires more merit the more he uses his tongue for good, not limiting himself to public sermons, but also making private exhortations. For this reason it is written: "The Lord hath given me a tongue for my reward" (Ecclus. 51:30).

From the preceding it can be seen that there are four motives which ought to urge us to fill our private conversations with edifying words: the example given to us by those who are greater than we, the command addressed to those who are less than we, the fruit which our neighbor gains from it, and the personal profit which we receive ourselves.

## 7.9 The Guilt Incurred by Those Whose Conversation is Entirely Worldly

Preachers who are forgetful of the sanctity of their vocation and who in their intimate conversations talk of vain things prove in themselves what has been written in the Psalms: “If he came in to see me, he spoke vain things: his heart gathered together iniquity to itself. He went out and spoke to the same purpose” (Ps. 40:7). When they go into the cloister which is dedicated to contemplation they bring to their brothers only outside rumors, and when they go out they act the same among the laity.

And sometimes with them this is the effect of a diabolic impulse, for it pleases the devil greatly to put into a mouth called to proclaim the glory of God and to procure the well-being of souls, words which dishonor it and cause scandal. This is, according to St. John Chrysostom, the evil spirit who dictates to us the vain words which we speak.

At other times worldly talk is due to the emptiness of the heart because the tongue can only draw from the heart what it finds there; and it is quite natural that a vain manner of speaking should signify the vanity of the heart. Vain words are, as St. Isidore says, the indication of a conscience and a heart full of vanity.

At other times frivolous talk is the effect of thoughtlessness; for there are many who do not reflect before they speak; but allow themselves to say anything that comes into their minds, chattering endlessly. An example of this is told in the lives of the Fathers: an old man who wished to visit St. Anthony accompanied two brothers who were also going to pay him a visit. When they were on the ship which was to transport them, the brothers conversed for a long time on many frivolous subjects. On their arrival St. Anthony said to them: “Was this old man a good companion on your voyage?” Excellent,” they replied; then addressing himself to the old man, St. Anthony asked: “Were these brothers good companions to you on your trip?” “Without doubt they are good,” said he, “but their house has no door: who wishes may enter, and it is often an ass.”—Thus he replied for they had spouted out like fools whatever came to their minds; whereas it is written in the Psalms: “The mouth of the just shall meditate wisdom” (Ps. 36:30), or in plain words, we should weigh our words before opening our mouths. St. Ambrose also gave this important advice: “Let your word first be corrected before arriving on the tongue.”

Insipid and idle talk is often attributable to a lack of good ideas of thoughts; and many speak in such a manner because they have nothing else to say although it would be better if they remained silent. By so doing, they could pass for wise men, even though they are only mediocre, for a wise man, as Ecclesiasticus observes, “is one that holdeth his peace, because he knoweth not what to say” (Ecclus. 20:6).

And again this manner of speaking may be the effect of too much intercourse with people whose talk is vain; for the preacher by mixing with such people becomes used to their language and forgets how to speak as befits his own state, as a Frenchman living among people who speak another language partly forgets his own and adopts this new language. “Their children,” who had returned from captivity, “spoke half in the speech of Azotus, and could not speak the Jews’ language, but they spoke according to the language of this and that people” (II Esc. 13:24), for it was the language of the women whom their fathers had married.

Sometimes this prattling is due to a lack of proportion, just as one consumes, needlessly, wine and bread in a house where they are not distributed wisely, so the thoughtless man who does not weigh and measure his words speaks superfluously (Ecclus. 21:28). St. Gregory says: “Those who do not know how to measure their words will inevitably fall into vain discourse.”

Preachers should guard against this evil. They are, indeed, the mouth of God, according to Jeremias, who said: “If thou wilt separate the precious from the vile thou shalt be as my mouth” (Jer. 15:19), and this is applied particularly to preachers. It would be wrong, therefore, for the mouth of God to speak idly. Their mouth is also a fountain whence flow the sweet waters of wisdom, and it would be unnatural that there should flow forth from it at the same time bitter and senseless discourse. St. James said: “Does the fountain send forth sweet and bitter water from the same opening?” (Jas. 3:11.) Furthermore, this mouth is consecrated to divine things and consequently studiously ought to avoid the words of the world; for what is consecrated to God should not be put to profane use. You have dedicated your mouth to the gospel, said St. Bernard, and it is henceforth forbidden you to open it in vain talk. To do such a thing would be a sacrilege.

Preachers ought to remember that they do not belong to the world (John 15:19); but that they are the disciples of Jesus Christ Who said to them: “You are not of this world” (John 8:23). Even though they are in the world they ought not to forget the language of heaven to adopt that of the world, as a Frenchman cognizant of the nobility of his native language does not readily

abandon it to adopt another. "He who is from the earth," says St. John, "of the earth he speaks"; while "he whom God has sent the words of God" (John 3:31, 34), and not those of the world.

If children who are obliged to speak Latin in school, are shamed when they are punished for lapsing into the vernacular, how much more ought those to be ashamed whose duty it is to help souls with their speech, when they fall into childish talk! "Of every idle word that man shall speak, they shall give account on the day of judgment" (Matt. 12:36). How much more shall preachers! "For the lips of the priest shall keep knowledge, and they shall seek the law at his mouth" (Mal. 2:7), and St. Bernard adds, "but not from nursery rhymes and fables." All the more, then, should he refrain from these inanities, who is at the same time both priest and preacher!

We read in the lives of the Fathers that two sisters, having married two brothers, lived in the same house and promised each other that they would not utter a worldly word until death. What a shame it is to see preachers abandon themselves to all kinds of empty conversations when two women are able to maintain dignified speech all their lives.

St. Isidore says also, in his tract *On the Supreme Good*: that it is not right for Christians to have on their lips vain words; for as depraved morals spoil good conversations, so evil conversations corrupt good morals. But if this corrupting of conversations must be carefully avoided by all Christians, how much more should it be avoided by the preacher whose essential duty is the edification of his neighbor!

Lay people, it must be admitted, have some excuse when they give themselves over to empty conversation; for they are ignorant of Holy Scripture, which would have taught them what to say. This excuse does not hold for preachers who know the Scriptures in detail and have a mission to explain them to the people. It is not, says St. Ambrose to them, a light responsibility when you possess in Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, in Josue and in Judges, in Esdras and in Kings, in the Gospels and in the Acts of the Apostles, the words that God has spoken and the marvels that He has performed, to neglect these treasures to speak of worldly things and to listen to such things.

St. Gregory, also, observes in his Dialogues, that by giving ourselves over to worldly conversations we pass readily from harmless things to harmful, and from trifling things to grave, and that consequently our voices addressed in prayer to Almighty God will go unheard inasmuch as they have been soiled in these conversations. Thus, it may be seen to what harm the preacher,

destined as he is to speak for the good of his neighbor, exposes himself when he abandons himself to vain words, for even the prayers which he says after he preaches will be fruitless.

## 7.10 What Must be Observed in Conversation in Order That it be Edifying

Those who make up the third class of preachers, that is to say, those who in their private conversations have in mind the edification of their neighbor, ought to study the words of St. Gregory who advises the teacher to consider what he should say, to whom he should say it, when he should say it, and how much he should say.

Firstly, concerning what he should say, let us note that it is necessary for him to have recourse sometimes to good examples, and now and then to certain worldly observations. In regard to the holy words he must not speak them at random, but choose the most striking and lucid so he will be easily understood; they must be both pleasing and profitable to the listener. Examples should have an obvious authority, so that they may not be received with scorn; they should be at the same time truthful, so that they may be believed; they should also be edifying, so that they may not be told in vain. Finally, when he finds it necessary to make some worldly observations in order to reach his listeners, he should deviate as little as possible from the divine word, as St. Peter recommends: “If anyone speaks, let it be as with words of God” (I Peter 4:11). Besides these borrowings from worldly remarks and observations should be rare, and always mixed with something spiritually useful.

Secondly, in regard to those whom we converse, let us observe that there are some with whom we should not discuss certain subjects, as we have already remarked in Section 4.3, *On Preachers Who Lack Judgment*. While with others, certain subjects are permitted, although anyone at all should not treat of them. It is not right, indeed, that one who lacks authority or the talent should instruct his superiors; Ecclesiasticus warns us: “In the company of great men take not upon thee: and when the ancients are present, speak not much” (Ecclus. 32:13). But there are other persons with whom we can freely express ourselves as long as the conversation is sensible; we can act in this manner with inferiors, simple souls, and lay people.

Thirdly, as to the choice of a favorable time, we ought to speak only to those who, being temperate and sober in all things, have kept their minds clear and disposed to understand what is said to them; or to those who are in the meantime free from other occupations, for Our Lord did not speak to Martha whom He saw to be busy, but to Magdalen whose mind was free (Luke 10:40); or to those who are willing to hear, for the word should never be addressed to one who is unwilling to listen. When Our Lord wished to speak to Simon the Pharisee, He first disposed him to listen, saying, "Simon, I have something to say to you"; and he replied, "Master, speak" (Luke 7:40). The most favorable time to speak is when we can introduce into our worldly conversations, prudently and simply, some words which will do good and counteract evil.

Fourthly, in regard to how much we should say, our conversations should not be too frequent, too exuberant, or too prolonged, lest we bore our listener. We will have arrived at a just mean in this manner when we know how to speak in a few words, simply, and in turn.

Fifthly, in regard to the manner of speaking, it should not be forgotten that this should vary according to the diversity of the persons, as St. Paul taught Timothy, saying: "Do not rebuke an elderly man but exhort him as you would a father, and young men as brothers, elderly women as mothers, and younger women as sisters in all chastity" (I Tim. 5:1). Let us recall also the counsel of Our Saviour Who advises us to correct ourselves sometimes in secret and sometimes before witnesses (Matt. 18:15-17).

Finally, according to the circumstances we should be brief or wordy, keeping in mind the state of the persons and the matter we are treating of. Doubtlessly, many other observations should be made at this point, but they have been already given.<sup>5</sup>

## 7.11 The Preacher Who Receives Secular Hospitality

Among those preachers who are so poor that they have to depend on hospitality for sustenance, there are some whose confidence in God is weak and who sometimes take great pains during their journey to procure the hospitality which will insure them all that they think is necessary. Our Lord

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<sup>5</sup>See *supra*, Section 17.

condemned them in advance when He said to His disciples: “When I sent you forth without purse or wallet or sandals did you lack anything? And they said, ‘Nothing’” (Luke 22:35-36).

Other preachers are so solicitous about their needs that they sometimes leave the country where they could do the most good, in order to avoid the discomfort of poor hospitality and to seek better. This, of course, is contrary to the example of Our Lord, Who often went to preach at Jerusalem, even though He received no hospitality after preaching but was obliged to seek it at nightfall in Bethany as we read in St. Matthew (Matt. 21).

There are others who do much worse for they go so far as to carry provisions with them, contrary to the rule which forbids this. These also are condemned by Our Saviour Who said: “Take nothing for your journey, neither staff, nor wallet nor bread nor money” (Luke 9:3).

Others are careless about where they seek hospitality, sometimes stopping at the homes of men whose reputations are bad or suspect, whereas the Lord has said: “And whatever town or village you enter, inquire who in it is worthy” (Matt. 10:11); and the gloss adds that the host should be chosen according to the testimony of his neighbors, lest perhaps his bad conduct prove harmful to the preaching.

Some preachers expect or demand more than is necessary in the way of food and drink, which is very unseemly in the poor of Jesus Christ. For did He not say: “Remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they have” (Luke 10:7); as if He had said: “That which you find prepared for you in that house ought to suffice you.” It is not becoming for preachers to look for unusual things.

Yet, others during their stay show little or no signs of virtue and leave behind them a poor reputation. Very different are they from the prophet Eliseus of whom his hostess said to her husband: “I perceive that this is a holy man of God who often passes by us. Let us therefore make him a little chamber and put a little bed in it and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick, that when he cometh to us, he may abide there” (IV Kings 4:9-10).

Others return again and again to the homes of those who have shown them devotion and end up by becoming a burden to them. St. Paul avoided this inconsiderateness by supporting himself with the work of his own hands: “We worked night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you,” he wrote (I Thess. 2:9).

Some preachers after receiving all that their hosts can shower on them show no sign of gratitude and never think of offering payment for anything



they have received. The Saints are different; in order to show their appreciation for anything they receive, they serve all before God and before men. The prophet Elias is an example of this kind when he sends forth to heaven his ardent prayer of the son of the widow who had given him hospitality: "O Lord my God, has thou afflicted also the widow, with whom I am after a sort maintained, so as to kill her son?" (III Kings 17:20); and at his prayer, life was returned to the child. The prophet Eliseus is another example, when he addresses these words to his hostess: "Behold thou hast diligently served us in all things, what wilt thou have me do for thee? Hast thou any business, and wilt thou that I speak to the king, or to the general of the army?" (IV Kings 4:13); and when she answers that she is sorrowful because she has no child, he, by his prayers, restores to life a son who had died. St. Paul furnishes us another example when he writes to the Romans: "But I commend to you Phoebe, our sister, who is in the ministry of the church at Cenchrae, that you may assist her in whatever business she may have need of you. For she too has assisted many, including myself" (Rom. 16:1). According to the gloss, this woman, who belonged to the highest nobility, took care of all the needs of the Church of Cenchrae, and St. Paul, knowing that she was going to Rome on business, out of gratitude recommended her to the Christians of that city in such a strong manner.

There are also some preachers, who by their displeasure with those who have refused them hospitality expose themselves to reproach and censure; such find their condemnation in the words of St. Luke: "Jesus," he says, "having steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem sent messengers before him. And they went and entered a Samaritan town to make ready for him; and they did not receive him, because his face was set for Jerusalem. But when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, 'Lord, wilt thou that we bid fire come down from heaven and consume them?' But he turned and rebuked them, saying, 'You do not know of what manner of spirit you are; for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them'" (Luke 9:51-56).

From the forgoing we conclude that a good preacher should not trouble himself about finding the lodgings where the hospitality is exactly to his taste; he should not turn aside from places where he could do good because he fears to find poor hospitality there; nor should he carry with him provisions in defiance of the rule; he should carefully avoid any suspected houses; he should learn to be content with a little; he should leave behind him a good reputation; nor should he be a burden to his hosts; he should show them

gratitude; he should hold no bad feelings against those who refused to receive him.

## 7.12 The Preacher in Secular Affairs

There are some preachers who are so averse to taking part in the affairs of the world that they refuse to help their neighbor, even spiritually; they are like the ostrich which does not take care of its young. Their conduct does not conform to the example set by Our Lord. For Jesus had such compassion for the crowd that came to hear Him that He miraculously provided food for them in the desert so that they might not faint from hunger on the way home. It is written of Him: "That he went about doing good and healing all that we in the power of the devil" (Acts 10:38). Does not St. Paul also at one time comfort by letters those whom he has converted (I Cor. 16); at another time take up a collection for them; and at yet another time show a heartfelt compassion for them? "Besides those outer things," he said, "There is my daily pressing anxiety, the care of all the churches! Who is weak that I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I am not inflamed?" (II Cor. 11:28-29.) In the primitive church, the holy Apostles shared equally in caring for those whom they had converted, even going so far as to provide the necessities of life, as is told in the *Acts of the Apostles*.

We know how the heretics take care of their converts, tirelessly collecting alms to provide for the needs of the poor who join them, and by such example attracting new disciples to their false beliefs. How much more care ought we to expect the preachers of the truth to take of their charges!

This is what the gloss understands in regard to the text where Jesus says to St. Peter: "Feed my sheep" (John 21:17). This is done, it adds, by providing the faithful with even the temporal needs which may be necessary. On the text where St. Peter says to the rulers of the community: "Tend the flock of God which is among you" (I Peter 5:2), the gloss again explains that this is done by providing for the needs of those to whom we have preached the gospel.

What we have said above is quite sufficient to show any preacher worthy of the name that he ought not to withhold from his listeners any aid, spiritual or temporal, according to the conditions of the time and the place. Many, says St. Gregory,<sup>6</sup> are wholly taken up with the spiritual side of the care of

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<sup>6</sup>St. Gregory, in *Pastorali*, part 2.

souls and completely neglect anything having to do with the temporal. By thus neglecting what belongs to the life of the body, they will not be able to do a great deal for those confided to their care. Their preaching will very often be scorned. Content to reprove sinners and offering nothing that would help them in the present life, they will never get a favorable hearing from them. The mind of the needy, in fact, refuses to accept any teaching which does not enjoin mercy; whereas the seed sown by the words takes root easily in the hearts of those who hear it as soon as it is watered by the charity of the preacher.

Then there is the other extreme in which we find preachers who are always busy with the affairs of their neighbor; at one time for a friend, at another time for a woman, or it may be for anyone at all who might come along. To these St. Gregory<sup>7</sup> addresses these remonstrances: Some forgetting that they have been made shepherds only of the souls of their brothers, put all their heart and all their efforts into assisting them in their temporal affairs, and become filled with satisfaction each time they present themselves. When, indeed, they are not thus employed, they do not cease to think of them day and night, when they could be tasting peace, being free in this regard. This peace becomes for them a hardship, for they delight only in action, and they become bored if they no longer have worldly affairs to interest them.

This preoccupation of a preacher, consecrated to the religious state and to poverty, engenders three evil consequences. The first is to inspire a contempt for his state; according to St. Gregory, Jeremias deplored this when he said: "How is the gold become dim, the finest color is changed, the stones of the sanctuary are scattered in the top of every street?" (Lam. 4:1.) The gold, says St. Gregory, becomes dim by mixing in completely human affairs; the holiness of life is soiled; the beautiful color is lost when the public esteem for those who were judged as good religious diminishes. For when one who is dressed in a holy habit permits himself to become immersed in worldly affairs, it is as if he were to lose caste in the eyes of men, and the respect which they had for him were to vanish. The stones of the sanctuary are scattered when we see those engaged in the tortuous paths of secular affairs who, for the honor of the Church, should devote themselves in the secret of the sanctuary, to the interior life of the supernatural.

The second evil coming from a preoccupation in worldly things is the danger of falling into the devil's hands; for these worldly occupations are

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

like snares, and the devil, the untiring opponent of the preacher, seeing him engaged in these activities, seizes him without difficulty, like a hunter whose snares have captured an animal. “For he hath thrust his feet into a net, and walketh in its meshes. The sole of his foot shall be held in a snare, and thirst shall burn against hem” (Job 18:8-9); that is to say, according to the gloss, he is devoured by the devil, who is here likened to “thirst,” for he is always the cause of the downfall of men.

The third evil is to check the work of preaching, for these occupations distract anyone engaged in such work; this is what the preacher should above all avoid, according to the advice of St. Luke: “Carry not a wallet” (Luke 10:4). And what, asks St. Gregory, is the wallet if not the worries of the age? It is better, therefore, that whoever has taken upon himself the duty of preacher should not carry at the same time the burden of worldly affairs, lest this new weight bow his head down to the earth and never let him look up, in his preaching, to the things of heaven.

This is so true that Our Lord prevented one of His disciples from going to bury his father so that he would not be delayed in the ministry of preaching. “Leave the dead to bury their own dead; but do thou go and proclaim the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:60). For the same reason He did not want any of His disciples to stop and greet anyone on the road: “Greet no one on the way,” He said (Luke 10:4). And St. Gregory, commenting on this, says that He did not permit them the time for salutations on the road, in order to show with what haste we ought to travel on a journey, the purpose of which is to preach the Gospel. Finally, for the same reason, He does not want them to worry about the necessities of life, and He repeats to His disciples: “Carry not a wallet” (Luke 10:4) lest, says the gloss of St. Gregory, they be taken up with the cares of temporal needs, and be unable to devote themselves to the eternal interests of their neighbor.

If, then, in order to avoid hindering our preaching, we ought not to bury our parents, nor greet those whom we meet, nor be solicitous about our temporal needs, how much more should we forswear other worldly activities!

The pagan Jethro reprimanded Moses, seeing him too much absorbed in the controversies of the people (Exod. 18), and if his reproach seems justified, even though Moses was entrusted with these affairs, how much more justly should the preacher be reprimanded on whom the conducting of worldly business does not fall? It is the stranger Jethro, says St. Gregory,<sup>8</sup> who judges

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<sup>8</sup>St. Gregory, in *Pastorali*, part 2.

these things sanely, when he blames Moses for entering into the controversies of the people beyond what is reasonable, advising him to appoint other judges to deal with them; in order that he might penetrate even more deeply the spiritual mysteries which he was to teach the world. What a lesson for us!

This is also the reason why St. Paul did not wish anyone to handle secular business, who seemed to be more fit for the spiritual life. "If therefore you have cases about worldly matters to be judged, appoint those who are rated as nothing in the Church to judge" (I Cor. 6:4); in order, says St. Gregory, that preferably they be appointed to the administration of temporally things, who were the least gifted in spiritual things.

For this reason the Saviour chose, as the first preachers, men who were poor; He wanted their spirit to have that clarity and purity necessary for the spiritual life, and to be free from the distractions of temporal affairs. Give to inferior persons, says St. Gregory, the lesser duties; to pastors, the ministry of higher things; for the eye which watches from the heights must not be blinded by dust, which the care of earthly things stirs up. This conclusion will certainly be approved by those who rightly judge that preachers should not take part in temporal affairs, even for their own benefit, much less for the benefit of others.

And that is why St. Gregory,<sup>9</sup> believing always that a preacher is at fault when he completely cuts himself off from the affairs of man and also when he meddles in them to excess, says to the leaders of the Church, who ought to help the people by their preaching: Let not any pastor neglect the things of the interior life, in order to occupy himself with those of the exterior; but let him not neglect either paying some attention to exterior affairs, in order not to shut himself up too much in the interior. Thus, he must have sufficient interest in things pertaining to his exterior life, but such that his interior life will not suffer; and his devotion to the interior life must not be such that it would be prejudicial to the discharge of his exterior duties. Thus, we can understand the words of Ezechiel: "Neither shall the priests shave their heads, nor wear long hair: but they shall only poll their heads" (Ezech. 44:20). They are forbidden, says St. Gregory,<sup>10</sup> both to shave their heads, and to wear their hair long, signifying that they should not exclude completely the temporal well-being of their charges, but not to the point of allowing it to overrule them; they are, on the other hand, allowed to cut their

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<sup>9</sup>St. Gregory, in *Pastorali*.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

hair in order to remind them that, while performing the duties necessary for the temporal life, they must not allow themselves to be completely absorbed in temporalities.

It is necessary, then, to maintain a happy medium and to take care not to become absorbed in anything that savors of worldliness, nor to be taken up with the worldly interest of our friends of the flesh; but only those things alone should interest us, which savor of God, such as works of piety, re-establishing of peace, prayer for those in the depths of misery, giving counsel to the simple, and other things of this nature. Thus, did St. Paul forbid to his disciple Timothy any preoccupation with secular affairs, exhorting him to the things of God only: “Train thyself in godliness” (I Tim. 4:7).

It is important not to place any hindrance to the spiritual profit of souls, by doing anything that might repulse them, but rather we must be helpful to all, in all things, according to the counsel of St. Paul (I Cor. 10:33). The preacher should not take part in such odious affairs as the accepting of compromise, inquisitions, canonical visits, judiciary instructions and similar things, in which he will often run the risk of injuring many people. For this reason Our Lord answered the one who asked Him to intervene with his brother in the sharing of an inheritance: “Who has appointed me a judge or arbitrator over you?” (Luke 12:14.) If He Who is the rightful Judge of the living and the dead repudiates, in the capacity of preacher, this office of judge, is it not so much more right that poor preachers should refuse this also?

There are other affairs which lead us into danger because of the consequences that they entail, such as marriages, promotions to dignities and to ecclesiastical charges, assisting in the counsel of princes and other offices of responsibility. A well advised preacher will see that he does not lose himself in trying to save others. “What does it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, but suffer the loss of his own souls?” (Matt. 16:26)—a maxim which we cannot repeat too often nor meditate on too long.

Other undertakings which are prolonged indefinitely, such as the execution of wills, tutelage over certain persons, the obligation to keep deposits fore certain works, or other similar commissions, should be eschewed by the preacher so that he may have full liberty to perform properly all the functions of his office. The Apostle recommends this expressly to Timothy: “No one serving as God’s soldier entangles himself in worldly affairs” (II Tim. 2:4), for to place ourselves in such a position is to entangle ourselves in such a way that we will not be able to disengage ourselves when we wish.

Finally, if we undertake to discharge some affairs, it must be from necessity and not by inclination, which prompts St. Gregory<sup>11</sup> to say: We can sometimes through compassion tolerate the acceptance of earthly tasks, but we should never look for them by choice.

## 7.13 The Preacher Giving Counsel

This subject has an eminently practical character since it frequently happens that preachers are sought for counsel. Thus we see in St. Luke<sup>12</sup> crowds of people, publicans and soldiers, coming to St. John the Baptist in the desert asking: “What must we do?” St. Matthew shows us also a young man approaching Our Lord Jesus Christ and asking Him: “Good Master, what good works shall I do to have eternal life?” (Matt. 19:16.) Finally, after St. Peter’s preaching, “On hearing this they were pierced to the heart and said to Peter and to the rest of the Apostles, ‘Brethren, what shall we do?’” (Acts 2:37.)

But it must be observed that among all those who came to Our Lord to interrogate Him, there were some who did not do this with a good intention, but rather to test Him; for example, the Pharisees, of whom it was said: “There came to him some Pharisees, testing him, and saying, ‘Is it lawful for a man to put his wife away for any cause?’” (Matt. 19:3) and in another circumstance: “Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not?” (Matt. 22:17.) St. Luke tells also, “A certain lawyer got up to test him, saying, ‘Master, what must I do to gain eternal life?’” (Luke 10:25) Fact to face with such people Our Lord keeps a discreet reserve, and knowing their cunning, He answers them with prudence, as we see in the pages of the Gospels which we have just recalled. Thus, He gave to preachers of all times an example to which they can conform.

Some of the faithful seek counsel on matters of temporal interests, and we should not refuse them when charity demands it; thus we see the example of Joseph advising Pharaoh to gather the fruits of the earth in the time of plenty, for the common good of his people (Gen. 41). Others, such as the sick, ask advice about their health; and again we should advise them when we know what will do them good. Thus, St. Paul counseled Timothy, “Use a little wine for thy stomach’s sake and thy frequent infirmities” (I Tim. 5:23).

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<sup>11</sup>St. Gregory, in *Pastorali*.

<sup>12</sup>Luke 3, et seq.

And what is better, others ask counsel about the things of the soul and their salvation; preachers should respond promptly and eagerly to these, for advice of this sort, according to as it is good or bad, will lead to salvation or damnation.

Indeed, it sometimes happens that in a very grave matter disastrous advice will be given. This happens sometimes through lack of knowledge; and so it is necessary to consult learned men, and not the foolish whose ignorance leads into error. "Advise not with fools" (Ecclus. 8:20), says Ecclesiasticus.

At other times, the evil is done through pusillanimity; for there are some who do not dare speak the truth to princes, unlike John the Baptist, who fearlessly said to Herod: "It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife" (Mark 6:18).

At other times, harm is done because of flattery; for there are some preachers who wish only to please, and in cases where restitution is called for, and in other equally grave matters, they give only advice that will be acceptable. They imitate the wicked prophets whom Ezechiel cursed: "Woe to them that sew cushions under every elbow; and make pillows for the head of persons of every age to catch souls" (Ezech. 13:18). For according to the commentaries, we should understand these words as referring to those who flatter sinners in their evil ways. Indeed, sinners tricked by these flatteries remain undisturbed in their sins, as though resting willingly on soft pillows or cushions.

Again, the harm results from false pity, as in the case of those who are moved by pity for the state of the unhappy, and reassure them saying they are not obliged to sell in order to restore what they owe, or something similar; while Exodus says on the contrary: "Neither shalt thou favor a poor man in judgment" (Exod. 23:3).

At another time, greed will cause the preacher to give bad advice, causing great harm. For instance, there are certain priests who advise to use for the celebration of Masses or for anniversaries or other similar works, what should be paid back in restitution, and so this money falls into their hands. It is of these that Ezechiel said: "They violated me among my people, for a handful of barley, and a piece of bread, to kill souls which should not die and to save souls alive which should not live, telling lies to my people that believe lies" (Ezech. 13:19).

In other cases, the bad advice is given to win the favor of men, as with those who love to have it said that in the confessional their counsel is good; and so by this means they attract to it great crowds. Thus did Absalom



who in order to attract the people assured all who came to submit to his judgment that their case was good (II Kings 15).

Advice of this nature causes a great many evils. One of them is the error into which those who receive it fall; for they depend upon the advice and are deceived, and yet their mistake does not excuse them for: “a mischievous counsel shall be rolled back upon the author” (Ecclus. 27:30); and again, all should “beware of a counselor” (Ecclus. 37:9).

A second evil is the harm that befalls so many others; for bad advice given to a particular person can, in certain cases, injure a great number. Roboam is an example of this; when he listened to the evil counsel of the younger people rather than the ancients and resolved to stand firmly opposed to his people (III Kings 12), with the result that great misfortune fell on Israel! So too, from the evil counsel of a prince, a great number of evils falls on his subjects.

A third evil is the harm done to himself by the one giving the advice; for there is no more excuse for him who endangers the salvation of a soul, than there is for a doctor who through culpable ignorance, prescribes for his patient something that is injurious for the health of the body. “If a blind man guide a blind man, both fall into a pit” (Matt. 15:14). The same sentiment is read in Paralipomenon: “Whatsoever you judge, it shall redound to you” (II Par. 19:6).

A fourth evil is the dishonor which reflects on the entire community, whether it be the Church, a college, or a Religious Order, when one of its members gives injurious advice in what pertains to the salvation of souls. It is for this reason that the Lord, thinking to console His Church, deprived so long of wise counselors, said through Isaias: “I will restore thy judges as they were before, and thy counselors as of old” (Isai. 1:26), that is, such as governed the primitive Church.

A fifth evil is the danger to which prelates expose themselves. For they will have to answer for the mistakes of those they have appointed as advisors in the salvation of others. Thus, Mathathias did not make the first one who came along his sons’ advisor, but chose one who had proved himself and had shown himself worthy: “I know,” he tells them, “that your brother Simon is a man of counsel: give ear to him always” (I Mach. 2:65). And likewise, in Deuteronomy it is written: “Thou shalt appoint judges and magistrates” (Deut. 16:18); that is to say, take for judges those who have learning and the reputation of a teacher.

The last evil coming from bad advice is the scandal which is inevitable;

for although bad advisers may hide their ignorance for a time, yet it will be revealed and reach the knowledge of their superiors, causing much misery, scandal and trouble: “God,” said Job, “bringeth counselors to a foolish end” (Job 12:17); this must be understood, according to the gloss, of certain preachers who are incapable of giving wise counsel.

And so, in order to avert the dangers to which imprudent advice exposes souls, it is necessary that directors study carefully the teaching of the learned, especially in matters of restitution, simony, ecclesiastical censures, irregularities and dispensation from them, vows, marriages, promises and oaths, for here one meets with grave and compromising difficulties.

Of these cases, the first two relate to the natural law; the third and fourth, to the positive law; the fifth, to obligations willingly contracted with God; the sixth, to the will of God on men; the seventh, the one to man, the other to God.

In order to avoid the dangers attached to giving advice, one should add to his study, the habit of conferring with superiors and the learned about difficult cases; as Moses commanded the leaders of the people: “If anything seem hard to you, refer it to me, and I will hear it” (Deut. 1:17).

In some cases, it is well to delay giving an answer in order to have time to study or to take counsel with others, following the example of Job who said: “The cause which I knew not, I searched out most diligently” (Job 29:16).

Again, to gain time, we may let it be believed that we lack the authority in the proposed case and so postpone answering to another occasion; for it is better not to give advice when we are doubtful than to risk giving it when we are uncertain. “If thou have understanding, answer thy neighbor: but if not, let thy hand be upon thy mouth” (Ecclus. 5:14).

In the preceding, we see the manner in which advice is asked of preachers, and how it should be given; we see, also, what causes bad advice to be given, what the unfortunate effects will be, and what precautions we must take in order not to be exposed to them.

## 7.14 The Preacher Exercising the Ministry of Confession

Let us note here that a large number of those who have been affected by the words of a preacher will be disposed to go to confession to him; but there

are some preachers who, although they have the necessary faculties for this work, refuse to hear the confessions of the people. They are, in this respect, like a farmer who is eager to sow but does not wish to gather; for it is by preaching that one sows and by confession that one gathers the fruits. As Isaias said: "Sow and reap" (Isai. 37:30).

Some have no objection to hearing confessions from time to time, but they will hear only certain classes of people; but if the tribunal of human justice is accessible to the whole world, so should the tribunal of souls be open to all. Deuteronomy prescribes: "There shall be no difference of persons. You shall hear the little as well as the great" (Deut. 1:17).

Some are willing to hear all who come along, just as they present themselves; however, they prefer to hear those who have sinned less and consequently have less need of their help, than those who are more in need of their counsel; whereas Our Lord said: "I have come to call sinners, not the just" (Matt. 9:13), in order that they do penance. It is recounted in regard to this, that a jester having entered the Church while Lenten services were in progress, observed those who went to a certain priest, who was a good man to confess themselves; but this priest heard only the young girls, refusing to hear the old women who presented themselves to him. The jester leaving the Church began to shout in the streets and in the public places: "The old women do not have souls! The old women do not have souls!" Denounced as a heretic, he was questioned by the bishop, and confessed boldly to having made the statement and said he was ready to prove it. A day was fixed for his trial and presenting himself, he said: "Your excellency, you know well a certain priest and you hold him, without doubt, to be a good man and a worthy ecclesiastic." This was granted without difficulty and he continued: "With my own eyes I saw him send away from the confessional the old women and hear only the young girls. If the old people had souls, they would have more need of confession than the young girls, who have lived less and consequently have sinned less. If, then, this good man and worthy ecclesiastic does not wish to hear the old women, we must conclude that it is because they have no souls." Whereupon, the crowd started to laugh at what he had said; but instead of laughing at his reply, we would do better to hold in derision those priests who prefer to hear the confessions of innocent children or young girls or nuns, or other souls of this kind who are in a good state, to great sinners. As it is written in St. Matthew: "It is not the healthy who need a physician, but they who are sick" (Matt. 9:12).

There are some who are ill-fitted to be good confessors, either because of

moral weakness, or lack of judgment, or some other deficiency in their nature. But, they fearing neither the danger of scandal, nor the temptations arising from what is heard in the confessional, nor the important counsels which must be given, fool-hardily accept to hear indiscriminately all who come to confess. Soon they are driven by curiosity to learn the secrets of others, and to interfere in exterior things, not having the habit nor the inclination to remain in themselves; soon they are driven by their zeal for souls, real but imprudent. And so it often happens that they lose themselves in their efforts to lead others to the harbor of salvation. They are like those who in trying to save someone who is drowning throw themselves into the same danger and perish with him, as it is said in Ecclesiasticus: “He that loveth danger shall perish in it” (Ecclus. 3:27).

Others jealously attach themselves to their penitents, and cannot tranquilly endure them to go to other confessors, although it is sometimes beneficial for a sick person to consult several doctors. Our Lord did not act so with the lepers who asked for mercy; He sent them to others saying: “Go, show yourselves to the priests” (Luke 17:14).

Other priests are more interested in temporal gain than in the sanctification of souls, using the confessions which they hear as an opportunity to beg. The Apostle St. Paul said to the Philippians: “Not that I am eager for the gift, but I am eager for the profit accumulating to your account” (Phil. 4:17); and again: “I do not seek yours but you” (II Cor. 12:14).

Some priests by means of confession become so familiar with certain women that they bring dishonor upon both themselves and the religious life. St. Augustine brings out the gravity of this fault saying: There is something worse than fornication; it is the continence which becomes criminal and the sanctity which become infamous; then we blaspheme against religion when we remain interiorly chaste by laborious struggle, and offend without scruple by our shameless and unedifying exterior attitude.

There are others insufficiently educated and having no desire to instruct themselves in the work of the confessional, who cause much harm, now by questioning, again by absolving, or by advising or by those other ways treated at length in the last chapter of our *Treatise on Offices*.<sup>13</sup> They forget that virtue of commendable action does not consist in doing a thing, but in doing

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<sup>13</sup>In his *Treatise on Offices*, Chapter 47, Blessed Humbert gives clear, sensible, and practical instructions on the manner of exercising the office of superior, professor, preacher, confessor, and even the subordinate offices of porter, wardrobe keeper, cellarer, etc.

it well, as St. Mark says of our Saviour: "He has done all things well" (Mark 7:37).

From the preceding, we may conclude, then, that a preacher, provided he is fit to hear confessions, ought to do it voluntarily; to exclude all preference for certain classes of people; to prefer those who are most in need; to know, however, that if one is unfit for this office, he should not be over eager to do it; not to be sorry when those whom he has confessed go to others; never to make the hearing of penitents an opportunity for begging; never to permit themselves, through confessions, to become familiar with women; finally, to avoid every other fault which prevents one from discharging this holy ministry well.

## 7.15 Preambles or Exordia of Conferences and Sermons

First, let us note that it is sometimes unnecessary to precede the sermon with a preamble or prayer; for example in the Chapters of Religious, only members of the community are ordinarily admitted. In the other case, it will suffice for the preacher to ask a prayer, as is done in parishes where sermons are often given. In other circumstances, it will be necessary to give first an exordium; for example, in the case of solemn sermons, or when a large audience is expected, but as yet the people have not all arrived, or when one speaks unexpectedly, in order to explain the reason for giving the sermon.

In these exordia or preambles, we must be brief, for if we weary our listeners, it will prove detrimental to the rest of our sermon.

The exordium should be pleasing, so as to prepare our audience to listen with attention, good-will, and docility; just as writers do in the prefaces of the books which they publish.

The exordium must always be terminated by asking devoutly for the prayers of the congregation, that God may bless the sermon; for thus did St. Paul, speaking to the Thessalonians: "Brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run and be glorified" (II Thess. 3:1).

The theme of the exordium may refer to the person of the preacher, for instance when the preacher is a religious of the Order of Friars Preachers or Friars Minors visiting a parish, where both he and his Order are unknown.

He will make known, therefore, at the beginning, the spirit and the mis-

sion of his Order, so that it will not be thought that he is preaching in order to collect money. He should therefore say with St. Paul: "I do not seek yours but you" (II Cor. 12"14). And when he feels his own insufficiency, he shall say with Jeremias: "Ah, ah, ah, Lord God, behold I cannot speak, for I am a child" (Jer. 1:6). If he is obliged to preach in the capacity of a prelate, or by obedience, he shall declare it in these words of the Apostle: "Since I am under constraint, woe to me if I do not preach the gospel" (I Cor. 11:16).

Or the exordium may be inspired by a consideration of the audience to whom the sermon is addressed. One may recommend to them, for example, that they should not only listen to, but especially practice what is going to be preached to them, according to the advice of St. James: "Be doers of the word and not hearers only" (Jas. 1:22). They should be reminded that there is a great diversity among those who listen, for some will let the fruits of the sermon perish, while others will gather them in, as is recounted in the parable in which Our Saviour begins: "The sower went out to sow his seed" (Luke 8:5). Or the preacher shall promise reward to the good and punishment to the wicked, as St. Paul said to the Hebrews: "The earth that drinks in the rain that often falls upon it . . . (and) that which brings forth thorns and thistles . . ." (Heb. 6:7, 8).

Also, the exordium may be taken from the subject of the sermon about to be preached. If the sermon is on those highest and most impenetrable mysteries, the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Sacrament of the Sacred Body of Our Lord Jesus Christ, a prayer should be offered for the understanding necessary to speak well of such sublime mysteries, following the example of the Apostle St. Paul who said: "At the same time pray for us also, that God may give us and opportunity for the word, to announce the mystery of Christ" (Col. 4:3). If the sermon is about the beautiful deeds of the Saints, and for the purpose of giving glory to God, or to honor these worthily, or to draw from their lives profit for the people, a few words should be said in praise of them; as we read in Ecclesiasticus: "(Let) the church declare their praise" (Ecclus. 44:15). If the subject of the sermon is important for salvation such as penance, an exhortation should be made in order to dispose the people to listen favorably to this serious subject, with the invitation of St. James: "With meekness receive the ingrafted word, which is able to save your souls" (Jas. 1:21).

At another time, a text quoted at the beginning of the sermons will furnish the subject of the exordium. If it is obscure or offers difficulty to the understanding, the Holy Spirit should be invoked that He Himself might

deign to explain what has been proposed, as is written in the Book of Wisdom: “And who shall know thy thought except thou give wisdom and send thy Holy Spirit from above?” (Wisd. 11:17.) If the subject is an important one, its importance should be called to the attention of the people, as the author of the Book of Proverbs did when he said: “Hear, for I will speak of great things” (Prov. 8:6). If attention is to be drawn on the authority of the speaker it should be remembered that it is not man but God Who speaks in every word of our Sacred Scriptures; that it is on them that the preacher principally depends, and that the holy men who composed them have spoken under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.<sup>14</sup> For this reason the prophets often said: “Hear the word of God,” as if to say: “This is why you ought to listen, for it is the Lord Himself Who speaks.”

Sometimes the preacher will be inspired by the liturgical year. If it is during Advent he shall give reasons for speaking of this season, as, according to the Acts of the Apostles, the prophets did: “And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel onwards, have also announced these days” (Acts 3:24). If it is Lent, which is a time of penance, he shall show that it is fitting to preach on penance during this season, as John the Baptist and our Saviour have set the example, making this the first and principal subject of their preaching. If it is the paschal season, the preacher should explain that it would be unworthy of a tongue made of flesh to remain silent during this time, for He Who gave us the tongue to speak is resurrected according to the flesh, as St. Gregory observes.

Finally, the inspiring thought of the exordium can be drawn from the end of the preaching itself. For example, it can be shown that the preaching has for its unique end the production of real fruits. “We, at least,” says St. Paul, “are not, as many others, adulterating the word of God” (II Cor. 2:17), as fault which those commit who seek pleasure in the word and not fruit. Or, again, the preacher may show how easy it is both to find the word and to profit from it, as it is written in the Book of Proverbs: “The leaning of the wise is easy” (Prov. 14:6). Or, the reasons may be shown for giving a brief exposition of doctrine: “Thy lips are as scarlet lace,” says the Canticle of Canticles (Cant. 4:3), which signifies, according to the gloss, the restraint imposed on our lips.

From what has just been said, we can clearly see that in certain cases an exordium should precede the sermon, and in other cases be omitted; what

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<sup>14</sup>II Peter 1:21.

qualities the exordium should have and from what sources it should be drawn.

**PRAISE BE TO GOD!  
TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY!  
AND TO ST. DOMINIC, THE ILLUSTRIOUS  
FATHER OF PREACHERS!  
AMEN.**