

THE HOLY FATHER ON PREACHING

In the customary reception granted to the parish priests and Lenten preachers of Rome his Holiness addressed them as follows (says *Rome*):—

Preaching is an office proper to Bishops because it was to these, in the persons of the Apostles, that the Divine Founder of the Church spoke when He said: 'Go and preach the Gospel to all creatures.' But it is an office which the Bishops cannot accomplish by themselves alone, hindered as they are by the vastness and distance of the places to be evangelised, and immersed in the multiplicity of other cares which accompany the episcopal ministry. Hence they avail themselves of the help of priests of minor rank, to whom they entrust the charge of making known the Divine word to the people, in the way and under the conditions which the variousness of the cases require.

The Bishop of Rome, too, and perhaps more than any other, must appeal to the help of such auxiliaries to fulfil his duty of preaching the Gospel to the diocese to which he is intimately bound. And We are glad to salute so many auxiliaries of our episcopal ministry in you, dearly beloved sons, who are to preach to the people of Rome during the coming Lent. You are assembled here to-day in Our presence to receive, as it were, in a solemn manner the mission of representing the Bishop of Rome in speaking to his people, and We make haste to grant it to you, confirming the approval which Our Cardinal Vicar has already given to the choice of your persons for the most high office of Lenten preachers.

But precisely because destined to represent Us in an office which, like Us, you certainly regard as one of the utmost importance, you must, beloved sons, now harbor the desire to know the manner in which we would have you maintain the charge of representing Us. To gratify a desire so legitimate, We are pleased, first of all, to recall to you what must be the matter of your sermons. We will not do you the wrong to suppose that you are ignorant of your duty to preach 'the word of God'; and therefore We would not admit even the possibility that any one of you is preparing to take into the pulpit arid questions of philosophy, history, or politics. The sacred orator must aim chiefly at the spiritual profit of those who listen to him: but the rule of Christian life is drawn from 'that word of God, written and revealed,' which forms the deposit of the faith, and which is authoritatively interpreted by the infallible magisterium which Christ Himself has put in the Church. To this most pure source, therefore, let the sacred orators have recourse for the saving water wherewith they are to satisfy the people thirsting for truth: thence let them draw the dogmatic doctrines which alone can revive the spirit of faith, now grown so languid even in this city of Rome; and thence, too, let them derive the moral truths which must guide the Christian in the fulfilment of his duties towards God, towards his neighbor, and towards himself.

Far from Our mind is the thought of disapproving the moderate use of an efficacious refutation of modern errors; We certainly do not intend to condemn him who turns his eyes on the conditions of the society in which those live to whom his words are addressed. But the refutation of modern errors, besides being reserved to the place where it may be opportune, We would have presented as the logical consequence of principles previously established beyond discussion: it is only when the people are persuaded of the necessity of accepting the teaching of God even in things which human reason cannot understand that one can usefully deduce the folly of free examination in matters of faith or the pride of the person who denies the miraculous. Turn your eyes, by all means, as to the conditions of the society in which we live, but not for the purpose of composing descriptions suitable in students of rhetoric, but chiefly to indicate the fruit that the faithful must derive from the preaching to which they have listened.

We have referred to the fruits of preaching. Be not impatient, dearly beloved sons, if We insist on this point, and tell you openly that a sacred orator must not

aim so much at correcting the intellect as in reforming the heart, nay the very act of correcting the errors of the mind must be ordained by the sacred orator to the betterment of the practical life of his hearers. Let no one among you, therefore, content himself with a beautiful exposition of Catholic truth, still less be satisfied with a brilliant refutation of modern errors, without descending to the practical applications in both cases. Oh! how often it happens that the hearers are unable of themselves to draw the consequences which are contained in premises recognised to be beyond discussion. It is for you, heralds of the Divine word, to perfect your work to bring home to your hearers *how* and *when* they are to alter their conduct, now by abstaining from doing something which they formerly did, now doing that which they formerly failed to do. Do not be deterred by the fear of being lacking in the esteem due to those who listen to you; the concrete indication of the fruit which is to be drawn from a sermon is for many an absolute necessity; for no one can it be superfluous just as the words of a friend are not superfluous when he encourages another in a good action which has already been decided upon.

We say nothing of the form in which We wish to have the word of God proclaimed. The respect which is due to this, and the most high idea which, beyond doubt, you have of your sacred ministry, persuade you, dearly beloved sons, of the necessity of excluding everything which could remove or diminish the gravity required in the sacred orator. One thing alone regarding the form of your discourses We wish you to remember, and it is the care with which you should give them a most clear order in their different parts: while order makes it easier for all to understand the proposition which has been demonstrated, it is, on the other hand, difficult for the hearer of ordinary culture to retain a sermon in which the various matters do not stand forth as connected with one another, or the different parts are not mutually co-ordinated.

But in speaking to you who are to preach in Rome during the coming Lent, We have not thought of saying things that are unknown to you: We have meant only to remind you of what you certainly knew already, to stimulate you more and more to do everything in your power to render fruitful the mission We entrust to you of representing Us in proclaiming the Divine word to the people of Rome. It can be said that the same office of representing Us, entrusted too in a stable and permanent form, belongs to the several parish priests of this beloved city, because they also exercise among the people that ministry the habitual care of which is reserved to the Bishop of Rome. With reason, then, dearly beloved, can We call you too 'Our co-operators,' and you will not be wrong in taking for yourselves what We have just said for the sacred orators who have come here to be Our auxiliaries in announcing the Divine word during the Lenten season.

We know at the same time that parish priests and sacred orators alike, if their respective ministries are to be made truly fruitful, need more than aught else the help of the blessing of God: 'Unless the Lord has built the house they have labored in vain who build it' (Ps. cxxvi.), and therefore We invoke it copiously on them both. May the blessing of God illumine the minds and inflame the hearts of the heralds of His holy word in this Eternal City: Oh! may it be as dew in developing and increasing the good seed sown by them in the souls of the faithful who listen to them, so that to the sacredness of their ministry may correspond the abundance of its fruit, and the children of Rome, at the coming feasts of Easter, may rejoice Us by participating more largely in the holy Sacraments.

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