

Eighth Meditation: On what must be done to make your ministry useful to the Church

First Point

Consider that since you should be working in your ministry for the building of the Church on the foundation which has been laid by the holy apostles by the instruction you are giving to the children whom God has entrusted to your care and who are entering into the construction of this building, you must do your work as the apostles carried out their ministry.

As told in the Acts of the Apostles, every day both in the temple and in homes, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming Jesus Christ. It followed that every day the Lord increased the number of faithful and the union of those who were being saved.

The zeal that the holy apostles had to announce the teaching of Jesus Christ caused the number of disciples to increase, so they chose seven deacons to distribute the alms to the faithful and take care of their other needs, so greatly did these holy apostles fear to find any obstacles able to distract them from preaching the word of God.

If the holy apostles acted this way, it was because Jesus Christ had given them the example, for it is said of him that he was teaching every day in the temple where all the people listened to him with attention, and at night he would withdraw and go to pray on the Mount of Olives.

You, then, who have succeeded the apostles in their work of catechizing and instructing the poor, if you want to make your ministry as useful to the Church as it can be, you must every day, teach them catechism, helping them learn the basic truths of our religion, following the example of the apostles, which is that of Jesus Christ himself, who devoted himself every day to this task.

Like them, also, you must afterwards withdraw in order to devote yourselves to reading and prayer, to instruct yourselves thoroughly in the truths and the holy maxims which you wish to teach, and to draw upon yourselves by prayer

the grace of God that you need to do this work according to the Spirit and the intention of the Church, which entrusts it to you.

Second Point

It would have been of little use if the holy apostles had instructed the first Christians in the essential truths of our religion, if they did not lead them to live the Christian way of life and conform to what they themselves had lived with Jesus Christ. The apostles were not satisfied with teaching doctrine, but they had a marvelous care to bring the first Christians to practice their religion.

God blessed their care in such a way that it is said that those who first received the faith persevered in the teaching of the apostles, in the communion of the breaking of bread, and in prayers, and they continued to go to the temple every day united in the same spirit. In other words, after they were baptized they were living in harmony with the teaching of the apostles.

Following his conversion Saint Paul did the same, for it is said of him that after instructing the people of Ephesus for three months in the Jewish synagogue, he then taught every day in the school of a man named Tyrannus, and continued this practice for two years, with the result that the disciples of that city were baptized in the name of the Lord and received the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands.

The chief care, then, of the apostles, after instructing the first faithful, was to have them receive the sacraments, assemble for prayer together, and live according to the Christian spirit.

Above everything else, this is what you are obliged to do in your work. In imitation of the apostles you must give an altogether special care that those whom you instruct receive the sacraments, in particular, that they are made ready to receive Confirmation with the proper dispositions in order to be filled with the Holy Spirit and the graces which this sacrament produces. You must see to it that they go to confession often after learning how to do this well. You must dispose them to receive their first Communion with holy dispositions and to receive Communion frequently thereafter in order to be able to preserve the

grace they received the first time they performed this action.

Oh! if you knew the great good that you do for them by procuring the preservation and increase of grace by their frequent use of the sacraments, you would never let up instructing them about this!

Third Point

Saint James says, If someone says that he has the faith and that he does not have the works, of what use to him is his faith; can it save him.? What would it benefit you, then, to teach your disciples the truths of the faith, if you do not teach them to practice good works? For faith that is not accompanied by works is dead.

It will not, then, be enough for you to have instructed your disciples about the mysteries and the truths of our holy religion, if you have not helped them learn the chief Christian virtues, and if you have not taken an altogether special care to help them put these virtues into practice, as well as all the good of which they are capable at their age. For no matter how much faith they may have, nor how lively it may be, if they do not commit themselves to practice good works, their faith will be of no use to them.

You must especially teach this maxim to those whom you instruct if you want to put them on the road to heaven, so that you are able to say to them, you have acted in a way that is beyond reproach and it is this that has given consolation to us.

Inspire them also with piety and self-control in church and in the exercises of piety you have them perform in the schools. Instill in them the innocence and humility that Our Lord recommends so strongly in the Gospel. Do not forget to help them acquire gentleness, patience, love and respect for their parents, and all the conduct that is proper to a Christian child, in a word, all that our religion demands of them.