

Tenth Meditation: How a Brother of the Christian Schools ought to show zeal in his work

First Point

Consider that the purpose of the coming of the Son of God into this world was to destroy sin. This must also be the main purpose of the establishment of the Christian Schools and therefore the first object of your zeal. It must lead you to allow nothing in the children under your guidance which could displease God. If you observe in them something that offends God, you must immediately do all that you are able to remedy the problem.

That is why, following the example of the prophet Elias, you must show your zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of your disciples. I have been roused with a very great zeal for the Lord God of armies, he says, because the children of Israel have broken the covenant which they had made with God.

If you have zeal for the children for whom you have responsibility, and if you have committed yourselves to keep them from sin which is your duty, you must take on this spirit of the prophet Elias when they fall into some fault, and driven by this same holy ardor that roused this prophet, you must say to your disciples: I am so zealous for the glory of my God that I cannot see you renounce the covenant you made with him in baptism, nor the dignity of children of God which you received in that sacrament.

Often urge your disciples to avoid sin with as much speed as they would flee the presence of a snake. Let your first attention be given especially to inspire them with a horror for impurity, lack of reverence in church and at prayer, stealing, lying, disobedience, lack of respect for their parents. and for other faults in regard to their companions. Help them understand that those who fall into these kinds of sins will not possess the kingdom of heaven.

Second Point

You must not be satisfied with keeping the children in your care from doing evil. You must also lead them to practice well all the good of which they are capable.

Take care of this, then, and see to it that they always speak the truth, and that when they want to affirm something they limit themselves to saying that it is or is not so. Help them understand that they will be believed more readily when they use few words than when they swear great oaths, because people will consider that it is in a Christian spirit that they do not use more words.

Help them put into practice what Our Lord says when he commands us to love our enemies, to do good to those who do evil to us, who persecute us and speak unjustly against us. Help them completely avoid rendering evil for evil, injury for injury, and taking revenge.

You must encourage them, in accord with the teaching of Jesus Christ, not to be satisfied with doing good actions but also avoid doing them before others to be esteemed and honored, because those who act this way have already received their reward.

It is important that you teach them to pray to God, as Our Lord taught those who followed him, and to pray with much piety and in secret, that is, with much recollection, getting rid of all thoughts that could distract their minds during the time of prayer, so that they will be occupied solely with God and easily obtain what they ask of him.

Since the majority of your disciples are born poor, you must encourage them to despise riches and to love poverty, because Our Lord was born poor and loved the poor, with whom he was also glad to be present, and even said that the poor are blessed because the kingdom of heaven belongs to them.

These are the kinds of maxims and practices you must continually inspire in your disciples if you have any zeal for their salvation. This will be the way you will show yourselves zealous for the glory of God; since these maxims can come only from God (being contrary to human inclination), it is a mark of zeal for the honor and glory of God to inspire children to put them in practice.

Third Point

Your zeal for the children you instruct would not go very far and would not have

much result or success if it limited itself only to words. To make it effective it is necessary that your example support your instructions, and this is one of the main signs of your zeal.

Saint Paul, speaking to the Philippians, after teaching them different maxims, adds, Act according to the same maxims and so be imitators of me, and look to those who live according to the example that I have given you; do the things that I have taught you, what I have said to you, what I have written to you, and of which I have given you the example. So, the ardent zeal of this great saint for the salvation of souls was to have them observe what he practiced himself.

This is also the way that Our Lord acted, of whom it is said that he began to do and then to teach, and speaking to his apostles about himself after he had washed their feet, he says, I have given you an example, so that you may do as I have done to you.

It is easy to conclude from these examples that your zeal for the children who are under your guidance would be very imperfect if you exercised it only by instructing them; it will only become perfect if you practice yourselves what you are teaching them. Example makes a much greater impression on the mind and heart than words especially for children, since they do not yet have minds sufficiently able to reflect, and they ordinarily model themselves on the example of their teachers. They are led more readily to do what they see done for them than what they hear told to them, above all when the teachers' words are not in harmony with their actions.