

5. PATRON OF MORAL THEOLOGIANS

By Joaquim Parron, C.Ss.R. (Campo Grande, BRASIL)

Gospel Reading:

1 Jn 4:8-9

Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him

The Gospel of the Lord

One of the most widely read Catholic authors, St. Alphonsus is the patron saint of confessors and moral theologians. In our time when Confession has fallen by the wayside for far too many Catholics, St. Alphonsus shows us how much we need God's love and mercy in this Sacrament.

He was born in 1696, in Naples, Italy. Although he was a very competent lawyer, he decided to give up everything to proclaim the love of God to all people. He became a priest and later founded the Congregation of the Redemptorists, with the intention to proclaim the love and mercy of God, especially to the poor.

His love for the Lord Jesus was very strong, and he used to pray: "My lover belongs to me and I to him. My God has given himself entirely to me, and I have given myself entirely to him. I am no longer my own, I belong entirely to my God." Alphonsus encountered the Lord in the poor. He started to write moral theology to help people understand the love of Jesus Christ. Jesus gave his life for us; He shed his blood for us!

St. Alphonsus' writings became a secure guide for priests to hear confessions. So, Pope Pius IX in 1871, made him a Doctor of the Church for his contribution to moral doctrine of the Church. St. Alphonsus was a brilliant moral theologian. He understood the teachings of the Church and called all souls in his care to live in accordance with God's will, but he also extended to the sinner the great mercy of Christ.

Even Pope Francis said, a few months ago, Saint Alphonsus was concerned with real people and their lives and their situation, and not just with principles or ideas.

St. Alphonsus never stopped saying that priests are visible signs of the infinite mercy of God who forgives, and enlightens the mind and heart of the sinner so that he may convert and change his life.

Finally, Pope Pius, the XII, in 1950, made him the Patron of Moral theologians and confessors.

He became a moral theologian of the just balance, between law and liberty, the law of God and the rights of human beings, authority and reason, and between grace and free will.

I would like to share with you a little story that will help you to understand the effect of his teaching.

Saint John Vianney, the famous Cure d'Ars, was a holy confessor. However, he was a rigorist regarding confession. He was tough with people. He felt himself obliged in conscience to defer many absolutions, his penitents, coming from afar and waiting days and even weeks for the forgiveness of God and the Church. Thus, the innkeepers of Ars made a good business because there were so many people in their hotels waiting for absolution.

His bishop, an enthusiastic follower of Alphonsus' teaching, made a recommendation to Fr. Vianney to read the works of Alphonsus. It became a revelation for Vianney, and transformed his entire pastoral practice of the sacrament of penance. There were no more delays for absolution. And there was no more good business for the innkeepers of the city.

Vianney said later: "Truly, how can I be so hard on people who have come from so far, who have made so many sacrifices, and who are often obliged to come here secretly?" From then on, he started to absolve everybody who confessed.

This is one of the many reasons why Alphonsus became the Patron of Moral Theologians. His teaching helped priests and people to understand the Love of God.

For us, we can learn with Alphonsus' theology, what the Gospel of John said in chapter 3, verse 17: "God sent his Son to us not to judge, but to save us through him." God bless you!