

THE EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS OF THE EXAMPLE

Excerpt from the book: "Estudios Calasancios". Veracruz 2011

P. Francesc Cubells Sch.P



The Castilian saying goes that there is no better preacher than Fray Example. Calasanz was wildly convinced of the efficacy of the eloquence of the facts. Alluding undoubtedly to St. Francis of Assisi, who, just by walking around the city in pairs with another friar, affirmed that they had been preaching with the exemplarity of his presence alone, our founder wrote to Father Esteban Cherubini: "A preaching made with an example of modesty, of humility, of patience in any adversity, is worth more than many sermons of words."

In addition to this exemplarity that the saint wished to see the shine in every teacher, he was a supporter of "vicarious learning" (that which is based on the observation of a model)

and also of the "pedagogy of the hero." For this reason, he wanted the pupils to be told examples, especially of holy children. He ordered this in his Constitutions (317, 328) to confessors and preachers when they attended or addressed children. In the Common Rites, it is prescribed that the teachers converse with their students telling them "Some example of virtue rewarded and vice punished." In a letter to Father Castille, he demands that all the teachers, at least twice a week, relate some example suitable to the students' capacity. The Constitutions of the Nazarene College order that, in the readings taken at meals at that boarding school, they begin with the life of the saint of the day. For the use of the teachers, Fr. Juan Francisco Apa compiled a *Centuria di esempi notabili di alcuni Fanciulli e Giovani*, a collection of examples ordered according to the ten commandments of the Decalogue. This work was in manuscript during the lifetime of Calasanz and was printed in 1649 in Naples.

He also wanted the teachers, especially those of humanities, to compose epigrams in praise of the saints of each day, which, written with excellent calligraphy, were fixed on the door of the school or church.

He also distributed holy cards of the saint of the day with the main scenes of his life. Although he was very cautious in allowing theatrical representations with children since they distracted them from their studies, he gave in exceptionally when it was a question of staging or symbolic representations of the lives of saints, allowing the students to act as actors or to attend as public to those that took place in Rome by the Carnivals to counteract the debauchery of such dissolute days (EGC 389, 849, 1967 and 2334).

Also, the Calasanzian epistolary is sprinkled with examples. Sometimes they are biblical, like the allusions to Adam, Abraham, Esau, and Job (EGC 1817, 2197, 3384, and 3808). He gives Job an example

for not saying, "The Chaldeans stole my camels", but "the Lord, who gave them to me, has taken them from me". From the New Testament, he reiterates the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, cheered by the children, to which he also alludes in paragraph 108 of his Constitutions (EGC 437). He also proposes the example of St. Paul, whose gifts as a conspicuous propagator of the Gospel were wasted by God in a certain way, allowing him to remain imprisoned for two years (EGC 2498).

He also gives examples of the saints. St. Augustine is presented as a model in his refraining from conversing with women, even those of his own family (EGC 2122). St. Maurus is given as an example of submission to divine designs when God tested him with illness on going to France to find the Church (EGC 2276). He mentions the contradictions experienced by St. Dominic of Guzman when his friars resisted accepting his proposals of poverty (EGC 2232). St. Francis of Assisi is a model of humility when he renounced the priesthood, contrasting with Piarists who aspired to be ordained when he had professed as lay brothers (EGC 3706). On two occasions, he warns how much the famous Friar Elias made the Assisi friar suffer (EGC 2232 and 3052). St. Raymond of Peñafort gave a great example of evangelical poverty when he accompanied the Cardinal legate of the Pope in the preaching of the Crusade and did not want to change the regular observance of his way of life (EGC 1951). He presents St. Charles Borromeo, to whom he was very devoted, as an exemplary bishop of intense spirituality (EGC 3461).

In letter 2362, he proposes to Fr. Joseph Frescio the example of patience of that widow of Alexandria who asked the Patriarch to choose a poor woman to lodge and serve her in his own house but who had to bear it with meritorious patience when she was ungrateful and insulting in word and deed. In this same letter, Calasanz expresses an opinion that shows the high pedagogical and pastoral concept in which he held the examples: "GLi esempi sono scritti per nostra dottrina" (the examples have been written for our teaching).

Nor does he hesitate to relate examples from his own life when good advice to those who needed it required it, as happened with his exemplary rejection of the temptation of Valencia, when he was a student and a lady wanted to seduce him. The examples raised by the contact with people and clergy when he was a Visitor of the lands of the Diocese of Urgel located in the Pyrenees mountains.

It is not surprising that Calasanz was so fond of illustrating his teachings with examples because when he was a child, his biographers already presented him on a chair, at the suggestion of his teacher, reciting before his classmates the Miracles of Our Lady, which were versified by Gonzalo de Berceo, just as his exemplary mother made the saint learn them by heart.