

## HOW DID ST. GASPAR PREACH?

By: Willi Klein, CPPS

In order to find out how our founder had preached, I looked up four of the most important witnesses, Biagio Valentini, Giovanni Merlini, Francesco Amici, and Bartolomeo Panzini. The first two were some of the earliest confreres and succeeded him directly as leaders of the congregation. Amici was a famous homilist and Panzini a brother who accompanied Gaspar for 17 years. They all had often listened to his sermons during their missions. Some further information was found in his letters.

Normally, Gaspar's sermons were held during a village or town mission of several days, or a course of spiritual exercise, a triduum, a novena, or during a special time of the liturgical year. His favorite way of preaching was the so called 'folk mission'. His great examples were the Jesuits Segneri and Pinamonti, Balducci, Francesco di Girolamo, and of a later period Alfonso di Liguori and Leonardo di Porto Maurizio, Filippo Neri and Giovanni Battista de Rossi. For Gaspar the mission was "... an exceptional grace of God, and, by means of its ministers and preachers, a very special gift offered by the Lord to believers, a powerful summons, a privileged occasion to take one's own life in hand and imprint a new direction on it, to be converted. On account of this, following the path of traditional missionary spirituality, del Bufalo thought of the mission as a struggle, a military campaign, a hard battle fought to snatch souls from evil and to set them firmly on the way to salvation, sanctification and a truly lived Christianity."<sup>1</sup>

Gaspar was on his way untiringly preaching one mission after the other, so that none of the missionaries could keep up with him - as Fr. Merlini remarked. But those he admonished to watch their health: "How is your health: Please do not over exert yourself preaching; have somebody read out of the book of Can. Calamita. God accepts our good intentions. To tell the truth, I am very concerned about your health;"<sup>2</sup> and "Take care of yourself, put on a bit of weight, and do not preach with so much effort."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mario Spinelli, *Gaspare del Bufalo, Evangelisierung, nicht Gewalt*, Topos plus, Kvelaer 2003, p. 129.

<sup>2</sup> Letter #1413, to Fr. Beniamino Romani.

<sup>3</sup> Letter #581, to Fr. Adriano M. Tarulli.

A complete change and a new start that was the aim of all his activity. In order to reach the hearts of his audience more was needed than words; symbols were used, impressive ceremonies, processions, dramatizing requisites, and surprises calculated for effect. The listeners should be able to grasp this experience of Providence with both their hands. Moreover, Gaspar had inherited the lively imagination and the temperament of his father. But he modified the traditional mission that had sometimes deteriorated to a spectacle, a kind of pious entertainment, he arranged it more soberly and more effectual. Turning back, meaning a good confession, and new beginning were the aims of his sermons, the core of his evangelization.

Mario Spinelli writes:

With the beginning of his missionary activity, then, the oratorical prowess of Gaspar displayed itself fully. It was strengthened and honed by maturity and experience, by culture and interior progress, by apostolic labors and by a thousand stimuli offered, every day, by pastoral labors and encounters with people.... he emphasized a greater sobriety and essentiality. He emphasized a denser doctrinal layer and a stronger cohesion with real life as a sign of a simplicity, a relevance and an affective warmth... In sum, more than an orator, there on the platform or in the pulpit, he was a witness, an apostle who spent himself for his brethren, even preaching ten or fifteen times a day be it under the blazing sun or in pelting rain and, sometimes, going out without a voice, with his clothing soaked with sweat!<sup>4</sup>

Well, how did St. Gaspar preach? My paper consists of three main parts: First I'll sketch with simple strokes his way of preaching, then a few words about the training and preparation for the service, and finally some witnesses of his time will speak.

### I.

Examining the sources I noticed 10 distinctive features - 2 extraordinary ones and 8 general ones. The first extraordinary characteristic was called 'the gift of the word' - meaning a special gift of the Holy Spirit. By this gift Gaspar was generally presented with new

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<sup>4</sup> op. cit., p.152f.

inspiration while preaching and his audience noticed that he taught new thoughts in a creative way.

The other exceptional feature was his memory. Like Mozart in music, Gaspar was able to reproduce a sermon word by word after one hearing. He was able to quote by heart the Old and New Testament, the psalms, texts of the Early Fathers and other spiritual writers.

These are the further – ‘normal’ characteristics of his preaching:

1. He often uses quotations from the Bible or the Early Fathers as a starting point and explains the topic or he confirms the theme with such a quotation. That was a new way of preaching, for many preachers of his time cultivated a more allegorical and describing style.
2. He stresses the importance of a lucid, philosophically and theologically founded argumentation. Thus he refutes the widely known errors of sectarians and enemies of the church. He discriminates clearly between demand and advice and avoids in his sermons topics that cause discussions in the church.
3. Gaspar often illustrates his topics with examples taken from the daily life of his audience or from the lives of the saints, but his illustrations are never dull or superficial.
4. He avoids harsh, frightening speeches and when he notices that his listeners are frightened he usually adds: "We have always to think well of God."
5. Gaspar doesn't hesitate to show his personal feelings - not in an artificial way but as the true expression of his own feelings. Thus the hearts of his listeners are moved.
6. More than with his voice, which was rather weak, he impressed with his gestures and the objects that he showed, specially the crucified Christ. Thus even illiterate persons can understand him well. But there is nothing exaggerated, his looks and behavior are noble and true.
7. He adapts his noticeable eloquence to the ability of his audience - whether it is the population of a mountain village, a group of lawyers or the clergy of a town.
8. The listeners are always aware of the respect with which he talks to them, his voice, his gestures or expressions are never offending.

Now let's see how Gaspar prepared his sermons.

First, all his life he read, meditated and studied the Bible, spiritual writers and famous preachers. Second point in his preparations was the praying. Normally he would jot down some keywords, then pray and afterwards complete his sentences. In the general archive of our congregation there are 514 sketches for sermons on about 300 different topics. He wrote sketches for himself or for a missionary or dictated them. Certainly many of these sketches got lost.

He differentiated the topic of Christ's Blood in such a way:

1. The topicality of the veneration of Christ's Blood, the mystical weapon of the time.
2. The aim of the veneration of Christ's Blood - to make good towards Jesus, the Redeemer [*reparatio*]; reconciliation with God the Father [*propitiatio*]; sanctification of man [*sanctificatio*].
3. Preserving the cult in honor of Christ's Blood.
4. The excellence and justification of the veneration of the Blood of Christ.

In a letter Gaspar writes: "Our practice of giving Missions and Retreats makes it clear that whoever does not wish to apply himself to the study of preaching should not consider joining this institute, nor would the Institute admit him."<sup>5</sup> To Cardinal Bellisario Cristaldi, the promoter and benefactor of the congregation, he writes: "Then, too, there is always the continuous task of working on so-called preaching materials, plus everything else that you, in your wisdom, can realize well."<sup>6</sup> And to the missionary Mattia Cardillo: "I am holding on to the list of preachable topics which we like so much. To send these pages to you will have to wait for the opportune occasion, as well as a bit of time for making a copy of them."<sup>7</sup> Fr. Marcellino Brandimarte admonishes: "Above all, prepare well everything that you preach, since the most lovable God merits being served with fidelity and exactitude. Give there an edifying example, as I have no doubt you will do."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Letter #619, to Gonfaloniere Carlo Feliciangeli.

<sup>6</sup> Letter #1499.

<sup>7</sup> Letter #2869.

<sup>8</sup> Letter #3891.

Gaspar attached great importance on the learning of preaching for the *candidates in formation*. Full of joy he writes to the archbishop of Camerino, Msgr. Nicola Mattei: “The Holy Father is quite pleased with the idea of a Boarding School at S. Felice di Giano, for those who, having already completed their Seminary studies, will now prepare themselves for the preaching ministry,”<sup>9</sup> and he informs Pope Gregory XVI: “In the field of oratory, the young men are given training in the basics of preaching, following the pattern that is so laudably practiced by other sacred Institutes and especially by the Fathers of the Company of Jesus.”<sup>10</sup>

The new priest and confrere Fr. Orazio Bracaglia was attentively and tactfully accompanied by him; he writes to him: “In obedience, you are called to travel to S. Felice di Giano where I am assigning you as a Missionary in residence there. However, I would be pleased if you would not preach until the time of Lent so that if there were requests for Lenten preaching, I would like to know whether you have properly prepared yourself through study to be able to preach easily three times per week. After writing this, however, I feel that the situation may be a bit hurried; so let us allow this to be set aside for this year and you just be on hand taking your turn in preaching with the other Missionaries. I hope that I have made myself clear. In your quiet retirement there, in silence and in prayer as well as in study, you will derive great profit.”<sup>11</sup>

In a later letter:

With regard to preaching, let me know whether your voice is up to preaching; or whether, because of reasons of health, you should abstain. In the meantime, however, it would be good for you to apply yourself to catechetical instructions which will provide you with reasons for re-cultivating, so to speak, matters dealing with morals. In addition, prepare things in alphabetical order so as to keep a note of everything that is worthy of preaching. Very profitable, too, would be a careful reading of the writings of Father Segneri, skipping over the mythological facts which are no longer in use in our times. In Segneri you will discover very beautiful material, and as you continue your letter-correspondence and having your compositions

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<sup>9</sup> Letter #1342.

<sup>10</sup> Letter #2140.

<sup>11</sup> Letter #2624.

reviewed, you will form for yourself some programs conducive to the glory of God. Here is one, for example: you wish to give a catechetical instruction on charity. First read Segneri; next, check the index found in the "Manna" by the same author. There you will find other points beyond what you have discovered in his "*Cristiano istruito*". Then arrange your thoughts and proofs in successive order, supported then with opportune examples, avoiding in your preaching questionable matters and thus producing only certain doctrine. You will be richly blessed by God.

See that your preaching is simple, dignified, clear and tending toward getting results. Avoid being monotonous and learn how to distinguish the fervor of your instruction with the various inflections of your voice. These are basic things. The rest will follow. (...) In the matter of preaching, the ministry is facilitated by presenting examples from the life of the most holy Mary. Pep talks etc. after acquiring a certain facility, it will be easier to make use of the platform, and a beginning can be made by giving fervorinos for general communions. Above all, have trust in God and you will be victorious. Become accustomed to being brief, and you will be doing a greater good.<sup>12</sup>

Again and again the founder reminds himself and his missionaries that the best prepared sermon can't bear fruit unless the personal conviction of the preacher backs it: "Everybody knows what two means were used in the defeating of idolatry: preaching and miracles. God willed that these two means be placed at the disposal of persons who were not only good in their personal lives, but most exemplary, as though without this they would not have had sufficient power to move anyone with their preaching nor convince anyone by their miracles."<sup>13</sup> "Above all, offer prayers *sine intermissione* so that in preaching to others, I myself do not become worse."<sup>14</sup> "Keep up your kind prayers for me so that while preaching to others I know how to preach to myself."<sup>15</sup> "If the apostle St. Paul was fearful that after preaching to others he might become more reprehensible than all of them, what ought we to say, if the Apostle felt that way? Keep well in mind that since we are to communicate a spirit of fervor to others, it is necessary that we be well supplied and filled in a special way

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<sup>12</sup> Letter #2674.

<sup>13</sup> Letter #42, to Msgr. Annibale Ginnasi.

<sup>14</sup> Letter #145, to Card. Bellisario Cristaldi.

<sup>15</sup> Letter #154, to Fr. Anacicto Giliucci.

ourselves.”<sup>16</sup> “They [the missionaries] will inculcate a salutary fear of divine judgment with which the one who preaches should also be imbued. They will preach to the heart from the heart.”<sup>17</sup>

### **III.**

Gaspar’s preaching was extraordinary effective according to the information of some witnesses. The following credentials can all be found in the records of his beatification process.

#### **1. GIOVANNI MERLINI**

“It is certainly true that one could see the spirit of the Lord in him; otherwise, he could never have spoken with such readiness, persuasive power, strength and decisiveness in such a manner, that one could never repeat, unless a much higher spirit dwelt in him.”<sup>18</sup>

Merlini was convinced that Gaspar owned among other intellectual talents the gift of the word:

From Fr. Valentini and from others, I learned that the Servant of God was an extraordinary man, endowed by God with special gifts among which, as I have been told, was the gift of preaching. I hold this to be exactly true...It is quite true that he studied continuously and occupied himself in writing. But, what he accomplished in deed was proportionately greater... Above all, I am of the opinion that the Servant of God possessed the gift which the Apostle called ‘*sermo sapientiae*’, particularly because in his apologetical talks, as we have seen, he was notably effective and even converted non-believers, namely, the sectarians, along with sinners, as I related before and as is well-known. I would further add that the Servant of God used to say to me that whenever he gave those apologetical talks, God would give him that gift. This same gift can be noted likewise in the things that he wrote, particularly when he treated the topic of the title of the most Precious Blood, which I spoke of already.<sup>19</sup>

As far as the contents and the method of his preaching is concerned, “he handled the Scriptures and the Fathers with utter ease and especially paraphrased the Psalms in a

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<sup>16</sup> Method for the Spiritual Exercises, in: Gaspare del Bufalo, *Chi e il Missionario?*, Pia Unione Preziosissimo Sangue, Roma 1985, p.9.

<sup>17</sup> Circular letter No. 4, op. cit., p.48.

<sup>18</sup> G. Merlini, *Gaspare del Bufalo, un santo scruta un santo*, edit. Beniamino Conti, Pia Unione Preziosissimo Sangue, Roma - Albano 1984, p.66.

<sup>19</sup> op. cit., p.632.

marvelous manner. He would select only those themes that were substantial and he would avoid topics that were not completely clear. He was particularly careful to observe rigorously the correct theological terminology, which he also insisted that we do by setting down rules for exactness in expression.”<sup>20</sup>

He advised “to preach to the people only what was certain and also to distinguish between commandment and counsel, in order not to confuse.”<sup>21</sup>

G. Merlini remarks: “Obligations were, indeed, for him something noble and extensive; he escaped the cut and dry categories, and he warned me about such things. He preached of God, of the soul, of eternity with a fullness of heart. He was thoroughly distressed with any stifling of spirit. His manner of developing the exposition of even the most difficult truths of our religion was such that it drew every soul to the love of God. When he noticed a certain hardness of heart in his listeners during his sermon, he would say: *Sentite de Domino in bonitate.*”<sup>22</sup>

He used a straight forward language, showed self control, he was moderate and preferred the concrete. Further on Merlini witnesses:

Through his own proper gift of weaving things together, the unlettered also were able to have their hunger sated. Many times, they were moved to compunction by his gestures, by the tone of his voice, by his very comportment... Especially stunning were his digressions which came to him spontaneously and, although prolonged occasionally, he skillfully worked his way back to the thread of his thought without anyone scarcely realizing it. During these digressions, he would get down to the practical level and, in as far as he was able, he would adapt himself to the level of his audience, selecting pertinent comparisons but at the same time not detracting from the dignity of the holy word of God. This was something that he advised all of us to be careful about.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> op. cit., p.66.

<sup>21</sup> op. cit., p.66.

<sup>22</sup> op. cit., p.66f.

<sup>23</sup> op. cit., p.67.



Merlini reports that Nicola Palma, a Canon in the Abruzzo, has written a summary of the Missions given in the city of Teramo in 1822 and 1823. Palma says:

I observed these things... : first, del Bufalo's digressions, always very appropriate, to which his enthusiasm so often led him, did not cause him to stray far from his main points; second, without stopping, without repeating, without making errors, he avoided presenting anything that would disgust his audience. Neither did he assume airs either in his gestures, his voice or the expression on his face, whatever the topic may have been that he was treating; third, that in the outpouring of his feelings, which could be produced by nothing other than his purity of intention and his inner conviction of what was being explained, he found the secret to moving people, especially when he would take into his hands the large, beautiful Crucifix that he always carried with him on his Missions. From that point on, he was no longer the orator who was presenting an argument, but a heart burning with love for God and enthusiasm for his neighbor so that it is no wonder that even the most stolid person was moved to tenderness and tears; fourth, with a robust eloquence, supported by an attractive Roman accent and a very neat, regular, composed outward appearance, he would sometimes go on for a good two hours. Yet, no one in the listening audience felt the least bit bored.<sup>24</sup>

Merlini also says, that Gaspar displayed a most profound knowledge of theology and canon law: "He did so, on the one hand, in his public remonstrances and, on the other hand, in his contacts with individual groups separately, offering them the purest doctrine and the basic principles of our holy religion, and doing so with a spirit of piety and zeal, balanced always with freedom and prudence. A man of extraordinary genius, a man without officiousness in his words, a man whose very face manifestly reflects his deep-felt consciousness of his mission."<sup>25</sup>

And:

I am of the opinion that although he did not move people by the tonality of his voice, he did possess all the other talents for preaching. In substitution for that lack,

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<sup>24</sup> op. cit., p.70-71.

<sup>25</sup> op. cit., p.72.

however, he supplied his sentiments that were passionate, produced in his heart out of love for God. To that, he added yet his affection for devotions and ceremonies, as I related previously, which deeply impressed his listeners, as I myself witnessed. From all of this, many conversions resulted... However, I will say that although the mere tonality of his voice did not manage to touch someone's heart, neither was it irritating, even though, at times, it became somewhat raucous or even lost completely for a short period of time, especially when he had to force his voice in order to be heard. Indeed, when that happened, he aroused pity and then joy in his listeners when, all of a sudden, it would come back strong and sonorous.<sup>26</sup>

Generally Gaspar gave spiritual exercises for the clergy of the town during his mission. Merlini tells us: "His talks to the clergy and to the higher class of people were distinguished. In giving them, he spoke with evangelical liberty, but, at the same time, with respect, thus winning over the esteem and veneration of all..." And he did not mince matters: "If anyone else had said to them all the things that del Bufalo preached they would have been displeased. But, since it was he who said them, they listened willingly. This was his usual manner, namely, to speak with the freedom of the Gospel but always respectful of his audience. He would season his discourses by saying, for example, "while we intend to do good, we fail through ignorance, through inadvertence, through thoughtlessness, and that is, indeed, the fact."<sup>27</sup>

## **2. THE OLIVETAN MONK FRANCESCO AMICI**

Amici is another eye-witness testimony. He wrote an account of the mission directed by Gaspar at Ascoli in 1821. Among other things, he calls our attention to the "careful handling of the Sacred Scriptures" on Gaspar's part and the "inexhaustible multiplicity of all sacred learning" in his sermons. He also speaks of other personal gifts such as his voice, his gestures, and his demeanor, all of which contribute greater vigor to the content of the preaching "which does not stay in the ear but goes straight to the heart of the hearers." Among other things, in speaking of the talks given to the clergy, it said the following:

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<sup>26</sup> op. cit., p.72.

<sup>27</sup> op. cit., p.67.

In those conferences, which might better be entitled a public schooling in religion, the highly-esteemed Missionary (he is speaking of the Servant of God) was the source of constant amazement because of his gentle and winning manner, his interweaving of ideas as he poured out his exposition with surprising naturalness and dignity, and because of his skillful handling of the Sacred Scriptures, along with his inexhaustible storehouse of sacred erudition. They were seasoned and delivered with his unique style, unhesitating as the flow of a river, and holding his audiences spellbound. At that moment when the intellect is illumined by the irresistible light of truth, supported by reason and revelation, he would lead one on, or, should I say rather that he drew one almost insensibly along with him by a secret, wonderful enchantment which one could not possibly imagine, unless one actually heard him. With assurance, it can be asserted that in this type of quiet, yet discursive, eloquence, it would be quite difficult to find his equal.<sup>28</sup>

Then, speaking of his sermons, it says:

With the crucifix and the image of St. Francis Xavier being carried before him as an escort, and, reciting devout prayers in a low voice, he would ascend the platform. After the usual preparations and the customary greeting with the ejaculatory prayer to the Blood of Jesus Christ, he would begin by first instructing the people in the various functions that would be included in the daily program during the Mission. Having, then, given as a usual thing a brief resume of what the sermon would contain, he would cite his text and state his theme again, which he always divided into its component parts, identifying the steps that he would follow throughout the presentation. In this outline, the main points would allow him, during the course of the sermon, the possibility of bringing in and using the many gifts that adorned his fertile imagination. If, in the ardor of his zeal, he was carried away with apostolic freedom, since *verbum Dei non est alligatum*, sometimes he gave the impression of having strayed from his theme, while giving practical examples in useful digressions; yet, he did that so pleasantly and with such dexterity that instead of losing the attention of his listeners, he captured it wondrously and opened it up to the enjoyment of a vast field of pertinent, sacred erudition which he had accumulated.

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<sup>28</sup> op. cit., p.68.

That type of freedom, not really in keeping with the strict rules of sacred eloquence, was in him a unique merit. Without prejudicing his main theme, he would extemporaneously proceed to discussing the lack of morality in his time and, in doing so, would allow himself to become emotional, but with moderation, never losing his composure. Rather, more correctly stated, he allowed himself to be moved by the spirit of the Lord who, *ubi vult spirat*, urging him on in those precious moments....<sup>29</sup>

And Amici is asking:

How could he, with such a variety of material and thoughts, often punctuated by gasps of embarrassment from the teeming crowds, always adhere to his original outline as well as to its development, without ever reproducing the same ideas, yet maintaining from beginning to end, the same presence of mind, the same strength of voice, the same cheerful look on his face. In truth, these were talents or extraordinary gifts and all of them were his... I proceed now to refer quickly to something about the sermons themselves that he gave during the Mission. On the first two days, he took as his subject: the truth of the Catholic religion as opposed to philosophical unbelief. It is not my purpose to analyze the natural reasoning nor the philosophical teaching that he detailed in his first sermon on the existence of God, the authenticity of the Holy Book, the variety of theological doctrines, accompanied with a profusion of scriptural texts, that he poured out, nor even the various examples that he used with a masterful stroke in his second sermon. All that I want to say, and everyone asserts the same thing, is that in those two sermons, both as an accomplished philosopher and a profound theologian, he summarized the most convincing power of Christian apologetics and brought out clearly the invincible triumph of the Crucified Lord. In the subsequent sermons, treating the last things, far from causing a feeling of gloom with tedious threatening words to a very large audience, he used his enthusiasm to lead them to renew their lives and repent wholeheartedly.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> op. cit., p.68-69.

<sup>30</sup> op. cit., p.69-70.

Amici was also struck by the incredible energy of the director of the missionaries. No one can understand, he allows, how he can "with just three hours of sleep at night, always have ... enough strength and a voice, manly and resounding, in a continuous exercise of preaching ... almost always in the open air." He speaks "without ever making a pause ... never coughing or spluttering, *sit venia verbo*, content only with rather rarely wiping his forehead with a handkerchief."<sup>31</sup>

Gaspar was an apostle, who moved the hearts of his audience, he convinced and converted the people because he was the first to believe his words. What he preached he lived without any exceptions. And that was felt by the people.

### **3. BARTOLOMEO PANZINI**

With regard to the gift for preaching with which the Servant of God was endowed, it seems to me that God had given him a special gift. He was able, on the spot, to deliver sermons on varied topics, to do so with clarity and persuasiveness for anyone who would be in his audience. He would move hearts to the point of tears. Everyone said that his sermons were well-prepared and were comprehended by both the learned and the ignorant. They were imbued with knowledge to such a degree that even I was convinced that, humanly speaking, he just couldn't do that without a special gift since, in his preaching, he sustained extraordinary labor, together with that of hearing confessions, writing letters of direction for the needs of his mission houses and handling all of the matters relative to the works of the ministry. It is my opinion that he was lacking in nothing for being, as he in fact was, a great, zealous and learned preacher of the word of God.<sup>32</sup>

### **4. DON BIAGIO VALENTINI**

Some people said that Gaspar in his sermons plagiarized some of Monsignor Baccolo's material (famous preacher, bishop of Famagosta). In this regard Valentini said in the process: "I know that, unfortunately, this very same rumor was spread about even during the mission in Camerino, that is, that what was preached was also plagiarized. The fact is that in his

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<sup>31</sup> op. cit., p.69.

<sup>32</sup> Vincenzo Severini, Giovanni Menicucci, Bartolomeo Panzini, *GASPARE DEL BUFALO, conosciuto da vicino*, edit. Beniamino Conti, Pia Unione Preziosissimo Sangue, Roma 1992, p.94f.

writings, not even in copies of them, did I myself ever see the sermons written out completely, but just a few notes jotted down, or brief snatches, or short ideas that were to be developed by some vastly capable mind. This was the conclusion reached also by the famous Amici,... He asserted that it was not possible that the sermons given by the Servant of God were written by anyone or even by him, but was really the word of God developed right there in the very act of preaching.<sup>33</sup>

It cannot be denied that the Servant of God was endowed with a great memory and power of recall... As regards his preaching, he surely followed and imitated the great orators, not in a material sense or mechanically, as is usually the case. He would take the theme or the proofs and present them in an entirely new way. This was noticeable in the sermons or reform talks that he spoke or dictated to others, selecting the themes from varied authors and then masterfully developing them with his own manner in order to bear the greatest amount of fruit. ... I must testify that... he was accustomed to first make an outline or set up succinctly the complete order of presenting the material and then offer a prayer at the foot of the crucifix so that he could continue to improve the work. Every once in a while, he was constrained to do it all over again and even better, with God's help, than what he had originally contemplated. ... With reference to theology, I... noted how well-instructed he was himself and how effective he was in instructing others... very educated people in various cities of Italy along with highly enlightened and learned clergy heard him on several occasions treat the same topics and have admired his ever new presentation of clear doctrines, avoiding uncertain and unproved positions. ... we had on many occasions heard him being very exact in his teaching and very strict with regard to it, so much so that he did not want the least inexactness in expressing oneself with equivocation or uncertainly.<sup>34</sup>

"Where there was a mixed audience with the ordinary people more numerous than the educated, he would give his apologetical conferences to the leaders among those citizens in some small chapel or little out-of-the-way church. In the small towns, he would work hard to

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<sup>33</sup> Biagio Valentini, *GASPARE DEL BUFALO, quasi un oracolo divino*, edit. Beniamino Conti, Pia Unione Preziosissimo Sangue, Roma 1990, p.96.

<sup>34</sup> op. cit., p.97-98.

make his sermons understandable even to the simplest, old lady, quoting examples from the scripture that were popular.”<sup>35</sup>

Some very learned people, who listened to him, had to confess that he would not have been able to say what he was saying unless he had had the gift of the Word, since it contained more than just words. Monsignor Strambi, now Venerable, wanted to hear the sermons given by the Canon during the mission in Camerino, at which he wished to be a companion. He conceived such a profound concept of the preaching that he had to say: „It is God who is preaching through the Canon”. The Servant of God, himself, used to say to me in reference to his preaching that, once he had mounted the preaching platform, he was overwhelmed with such an influx of ideas that he scarcely had time to make a selection from them, and they were things that he had not previously prepared at all by reading or thought.<sup>36</sup>

So, how did Gaspar preach? Catechesis, instruction in the basic doctrines of faith, and love of the Church were most important for him. His sermon was like a strong wind or a flowing river: He invites his audience to embark in the boat of the preacher; he took them on a journey aimed towards Christ and the beginning of a new life.

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<sup>35</sup> op. cit., S.99.

<sup>36</sup> op. cit., p.267.