

Sermon of St. Vincent Ferrer, O.P. – On the Cleansing of the Temple (Jn 2:13-25)

Jn 2:13-25 Douay trans.: 13 And the pasch of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 14 And he found in the temple them that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting. 15 And when he had made, as it were, a scourge of little cords, he drove them all out of the temple, the sheep also and the oxen, and the money of the changers he poured out, and the tables he overthrew. 16 And to them that sold doves he said: Take these things hence, and make not the house of my Father a house of traffic. 17 And his disciples remembered, that it was written: The zeal of thy house hath eaten me up. 18 The Jews, therefore, answered, and said to him: What sign dost thou shew unto us, seeing thou dost these things? 19 Jesus answered, and said to them: Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. 20 The Jews then said: Six and forty years was this temple in building; and wilt thou raise it up in three days? 21 But he spoke of the temple of his body. 22 When therefore he was risen again from the dead, his disciples remembered, that he had said this, and they believed the scripture, and the word that Jesus had said. 23 Now when he was at Jerusalem, at the pasch, upon the festival day, many believed in his name, seeing his signs which he did. 24 But Jesus did not trust himself unto them, for that he knew all men, 25 And because he needed not that any should give testimony of man: for he knew what was in man.

"For he knew what was in man," (Jn 2:25). The text is from John 2, and in this gospel we see three excellences of Jesus Christ

The first is his abundant power (*posse copiosum*),

The second is his pious will (*velle pium*),

The third is his luminous knowledge (*scire luminosum*).

Thus the Theologian [John] says "He knew..." etc. The theme speaks of the third, because Christ had a clear knowledge of all creatures, and also knows the secrets of hearts.

ABUNDANT POWER

For the first part it must be said that in Christ Jesus there was abundant and incomprehensible power, which no power of man compares, neither the Pope's, nor the King's, nor the Emperor's. For these powers consists in one indivisible point. Their power is either past or future or present. If perhaps you speak of the past, it is nothing now; of the future, because I shall reign for so many years, or I shall be pope, one cannot rejoice, because it does not yet exist and it depends upon chance [*consistit in fortuna*]. Let us go, therefore to the middle which is the present. For the Philosopher [Aristotle] says that of time we only have the "now," and so it consists of an indivisible point.

But the power of God is abundant, without beginning and without end, it consists all together in his eternity. Therefore it is said, "His power is an everlasting power that shall not be taken away: and his kingdom that shall not be destroyed," (Dan 7:14). This power is shown in today's gospel in the beginning when he says: "And the pasch of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And he found sitting in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers. And when he had made, as it were, a whip of little cords, he drove them all out of the temple, the sheep, and the oxen, and the coins of the money-changers he

poured out, and the tables he overthrew. And to those who sold doves he said: Take these things out, and make not the house of my Father a house of traffic. And his disciples remembered, that it was written: The zeal of your house has eaten me up," (Jn 2:13-17).

Note, St. John says that when the Passover of the Jews was approaching, Jesus Christ went up from Galilee to Jerusalem, and entered the temple, that is, into the atrium of the temple, and there some were keeping oxen for sale, others sheep, others were selling other animals, and there also were bankers there, who were changing currency for those who needed it. They were there so that people might buy them for offering sacrifices on the feast, that they might change currencies, or make loans, lest someone excuse himself from offering a sacrifice. They believed that by this they were serving God. Jesus entering the outer court [atrium], and appearing to be someone considerably disturbed, lunged forward [se movit] with whip in hand and flailed back and forth. One wonders why they did not resist him. But St. Jerome says that from Jesus face blazed forth a flashing radiance, from which all fled in great fear, and that Christ threw everything onto the ground, so much so that the disciples were amazed, because he always used to endure injuries, and never he never struck anyone. But they remembered the words of David, Psalm 68: "Save me, O God...I am become a stranger to my brethren, and an alien to the sons of my mother," and then follows, "For the zeal of your house has eaten me up," (Ps 68:2,9-10). And this agrees with that of St. Paul, (Cf. Heb 2:11). For the Jews were called brothers of Christ, because all came from Abraham. And Heb 2: "He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying: I will declare your name to my brethren," (Heb 2:11-12). And from the same mother – not from Mary but from the church, that is, the synagogue – and so Christ says, "I am become a stranger to my brethren," because they persecuted him, "For the zeal of your house..," etc. And he says, "has eaten," as commonly "sadness has eaten me up," and that zeal moved and disturbed Christ. In this is shown his abundant power.

This is clear from that question, when it is asked: Why did not the princes of the temple, and other resist Christ, so poor and so young, because he had just begun preaching? Response: so that the prophecy of Mordecai [be fulfilled] which says: "O Lord, Lord, almighty king, for all things are in your power, and there is none who can resist your will,...For you are the Lord of the universe." (Esther 13:9 Douay). This is the literal meaning.

But now let us enter the secrets of the gospel through three questions. And the first is literal. For it is certain that in the Jewish people there were other sins greater than these which happened in the temple, and nevertheless it is read that he corrected the other sins not by action, but by word. Why here does he make his correction in deed? Response: To show how much it displeases God that the temple be given over to profane and illicit things, just as it is when some people come to church to talk, perhaps about vanities, and about other worse sins with certain women, or with other persons about something illicit in marriage. And also sometimes when they hold wedding showers [faciunt nuptias si pluit], or otherwise dance in the church. Cursed is the wedding of such a person, just as for those who turn it into a market [faciunt forum]. Same for those who while they are performing their services wander through the church looking at the women, and doing other vanities. And about this matter the Master of Scholastic History says, because at the time of Julius Caesar, Pompey and Caesar were competing to be Emperor, and Pompey always won. It happened that this Pompey came to Jerusalem then subject to the Romans, and the stables were not sufficient, and they hitched the horses in the atrium of the

temple, not in the temple, and so for this reason he was always defeated and therefore he never became Emperor, because he did not give honor to the temple of God. And so if this one was so punished, how much the more then for Christians doing the same? And so it is said, "But if any man violate the temple of God, him shall God destroy. For the temple of God is holy," (1Cor 3:17). And it says "destroy," i.e. in diverse ways he loses sons, daughters, honors, reputation and money, and therefore he punishes those at his hands. And so in the entrance of the church there is always placed holy water, that we may sprinkle ourselves, because we should enter with fear. And so David in Psalm 3: as in my words, "I will come into your house; I will worship towards thy holy temple, in your fear," (Ps 5:8). And this finishes the first question.

The second question is, since other things are sold there, why does he makes mention only of oxen, sheep and doves, and the money changers, since goats were also sacrificed? There certainly is a reason. But it is hidden and allegorical. And I say that it must be responded that there are four sins of clerics, which happen in the temple, which are signified by these animals. These sins God punishes severely. First he says "oxen." For oxen here signify great dignities and prelacies. For then the "oxen" are sold when those dignities they are given to some for a great deal of money or valuables, or for presentations [praesentationibus] and not purely for God. "Sheep" however signify simple benefices which are sold when they are conferred for money, as above, or in other ways. "Doves," in which it is more – for the Holy Spirit appeared in their likeness – signify sacraments when they are given for monies received, then they are said to be doves sold in the temple, as if a vicar or curate was unwilling to baptize, unless monies were paid, or if they did not bring so many candles with their coins. Same in confessions when money is exchanged. Same in the sacrament of Holy Communion, if someone wishes to receive communion, and the vicar says that out of reverence of God you have to put money into the candle box, also "doves" are sold. Same for masses, and for all sacraments. See why mention is made here of these things. Money changers who are the sellers of monies, these are the usurers in the church of God, the ecclesiastics who give monies to the Jews, that they might profit from them [respondant de illis]. Christ scatters their coins and overturns the tables, their wealth. When Christ comes at the judgment, all these aforesaid money-changers will be cast out. And so it is said, "The merchant shall be no more in the house of the Lord of hosts in that day," (Zach 14:21).

The third question is, if to keep these animals and monies in the temple is such a great sin, what then if someone chooses to be buried in church, whether it is sinful or meritorious that his dead body be buried in the church? Does it help his soul or not? It is a good question. I respond that there are certain persons, holy and perfect who do not enter purgatory, but go on a straight road to paradise; there are others persons who rightfully go to hell; others, midway, who go to purgatory.

About the first I say that burial in the church profits them greatly, not that their essential glory increases, but their accidental glory. For when the soul sees that its body is so honored, it rejoices, because the body shares with the glory of the soul in the present in some way. And see the great miracle. For a certain one was in paradise, and he appeared to a certain friend of his, and said to him, Do me a favor. If you sweep my tomb every week, I shall pray for you. Behold therefore he rejoices more, if he is in the church. And similarly we read of St. Bartholomew, who appeared to someone, asking that he gather up his bones.

If however we are speaking of the damned, I say that it is a great punishment for them, and this in two ways. In one way because of the presumption which they had, since they were of wicked life and they chose a tomb for themselves. In another way, because already they see themselves to be in the prison of hell, and their body so honored, the damned says, "O wretched putrid body, so honored and glorified, and the soul tortured so fiercely."

If however we speak of those who are in the middle, that is about those who are in purgatory, it both benefits and hurts them, in diverse ways. Because if they chose it from a vain intention, it harms them much, and they are tortured much in purgatory; but it profits them much if they did it out of devotion, that their parents and friends when they see their tombs, remember them and pray for them. And in this way it benefits them, to the extent that if two of them are equally good, it is more advantageous for the one who is buried in church out of a good intention. For St. Augustine says: "This tomb is a reminder to pray for him, and so it is called a monument, i.e. reminding the mind [monens mentem]." And so it is said in the person of the dead, existing in purgatory, "Remember my judgment: for also shall be so: yesterday for me, and today for you," (Sir 38:23). Yesterday recalls the whole past time. So much for the first part of the sermon.

DEVOUT WILL

I come now to the second part which is the pious will of Jesus Christ. As for himself he does not wish the damnation of souls, but the conversion of sinners, and that the infidels come to the true recognition of faith. Therefore he willed to die, so that he might save us. And so it is said "This is good and acceptable before our God and savior, who will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator of God and men, the man Christ Jesus: Who gave himself a redemption for all," (1 Tim 2:3-6). Therefore it is a pious will [pium velle].

It is shown in the second part of the gospel, there where he says: "The Jews, therefore, answered, and said to him: What sign do you show us, seeing you do these things? Jesus answered, and said to them: Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. The Jews then said: Six and forty years was this temple in building; and will you raise it up in three days? But he spoke of the temple of his body. When therefore he was risen again from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the scripture, and the word that Jesus had said," (Jn 2:18-23).

They say that those who had been driven by Christ out of the temple, were agents of the more important people, the princes of the Jews and the priests, – like the canons today. They were the ones who approached Christ and said to him, "What sign do you show us, seeing you do these things?" which is to say that this befits the Messiah to come, not you who are just a poor man, "What sign, then, do you offer that you are the Messiah?" And then Jesus, replying, said: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up," (Jn 2:19). And the Jews understood it to refer to the temple edifice, but, according to John, "He was speaking of the temple of his body," (v.21), which was the temple of his divinity, as found in Col 2: "For," the text says, "in him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead," (Col 2:9). For the apostles did not then understand the words of Christ, but after the resurrection much better.

But about this part many hidden and beautiful things must be known.

First we see the blindness of the Jews. For Jesus Christ had a devout will, from the fact that he wished all to be saved, yet those about which scripture says, "For my people is taken away gratis," (Isa 5:5), say to Christ, that he show them a sign. O stupid question! For he already had shown you fifteen signs that he was the true Messiah, but they had forgotten them all.

1. And first was at his conception, and when the Virgin Mary had to get engaged, yet she preferred not to take a husband, and the priest of the temple prayed God what would become of this virgin. And God told him that she is to be espoused and that her spouse would be of the tribe of David, and that someone would come with a dry staff, and that he whose staff would flower would be her spouse, and it happened to Joseph. And then was fulfilled that prophecy, "And there shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a flower shall rise up out of his root. And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him: the spirit of wisdom, and of understanding, the spirit of counsel, and of fortitude, the spirit of knowledge, and of godliness. And he shall be filled with the spirit of the fear of the Lord," (Isa 11:1-3). And this sign was known to all living in Jerusalem. Were not the Jews ignorant, asking a sign of Christ, because they should have known the sign given in the disposition of his mother. O how stupid!
2. The second sign was at his birth, for he was born in the middle of the night, and the night was bright [claram], and lighting up what was obscure, like the day, and all saw the brightness of the night. And then was that prophecy fulfilled, "The people that walked in darkness, have seen a great light: to them that dwelt in the region of the shadow of death, light is risen," (Isa 9:2). There follows, "For a child is born to us, and a son is given to us," (v. 9).
3. The third sign was when the Virgin Mary hid her son in the manger, and those looking on, the ox and the ass adored him. According to the words: "The ox knows his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel has not known me," (Isa 1:3), and Habakkuk, according to the Septuagint version, "In the middle of two animals shall you know." (Hab. 3:2; according to the Septuagint version: *In the midst of two animals shall you know* [In medio duorum animalium cognosceris]; the Vulgate: *In the midst of the years you shall make it known* [In medio annorum notum facies].)
4. The fourth sign was when the angel on the same night appeared to the shepherds saying, "I [announce to] you good tidings of great joy, that shall be to all the people: For, this day, is born to you a Savior [of the world]," (Lk 2:10-11).
5. The fifth sign was when on the same night a multitude of the heavenly army aroused the shepherds by announcing and singing, "Glory to God in the highest; and on earth...etc." (Lk 2:14). This sign was manifest to all.
6. The sixth sign was when the magi kings came and the star appeared to them, which not only they but everyone saw, a true star, with their own eyes.
7. The seventh sign was when the Virgin Mary presented Jesus in the temple to Simeon, and he spoke to all who were there saying, "Now you can dismiss your servant, O Lord," (Lk 2:29).
8. The eighth sign was when Jesus, at age twelve, disputed with the teachers and elders of the temple, and it was well known [notorium] to all.
9. The ninth sign was the baptism of Jesus Christ. For the heavens were opened and a voice came from heaven saying, "You are my beloved son, etc.," (Lk 3:22).

10. The tenth sign was when St. John the Baptist said, "I am not the Messiah." But he said of Christ, "Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sin of the world," (Jn 1:29).
11. The eleventh sign was when he began to preach his heavenly doctrines. For Moses preached only earthly, he, however, heavenly.
12. The twelfth sign was when he offered the example of his holy, irreproachable life.
13. The thirteenth sign was when he worked a great miracle for the chief steward at the wedding feast.
14. The fourteenth sign was when on that day he worked such a great miracle. For all fled and they dared not face him.
15. The fifteenth and last was because it seemed that all the prophecies were fulfilled in him.

It was therefore stupid to seek a sign, and so Christ elsewhere said, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks a sign: and a sign shall not be given it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet. For as Jonas was in the whale's belly three days and three nights: so shall the Son of man be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights," (Mt 12:39-40).

And so he replied, "Destroy this temple," (Jn 2:19), Behold therefore how they were stupid, because he did not say "demolish,"[diruite], but "destroy [solvite]." And he said, "I will raise it up [excitabo]," and he did not say, "I will build it up [aedificabo]." And it is clear that it is not fitting for a bodily or material temple to be raised up, nor to be destroyed. But the soul is bound the body more than water to wine, and what is mixed is neither water nor wine, because according to the Philosopher, the mixture is neither of the things that were mixed. But in man the soul and body are essentially bound, and never, before death can they be dissolved. Now unless they be blind they should see, why he had said "destroy," not commanding, although the verb is in the imperative mode, but as if permitting, that he gives permission and power. For otherwise they were not able, and because he was Emperor, therefore he spoke "imperatively."

And so it is said in John 10: "No man takes it [my soul] away from me: but I lay it down of myself, and I have power to lay it down: and I have power to take it up again," (Jn 10:18). And so he says, "I will raise it up," and he does not say, "I will build it up." However because they were blind, according to the text of Wisdom, "And their own malice blinded them," (Wis 2:21), and so they said, "What sign, etc."

Another secret is this in the fact that the Jews said that this temple was built over forty-six years, as is found in Esdras 6:3 because first the foundation was laid, but later it was forbidden, up to the time of king Darius, and that was forty years. And so they wanted to make the argument that he could not possibly rebuild this temple in so brief a time. They were speaking about the material temple, and it was true, because that was built in forty-six years. Nevertheless this saying can even be verified about the body of Christ, whose foundation was the body of the Virgin Mary, that it was laid on the day of his conception, and remained nine months in the womb of his mother, which time can be counted as one year. And when it was in the fourteenth year that she conceived Christ and in the fifteenth she gave birth, so that from the laying of this foundation up to the nativity of Christ there are

sixteen years, and from those sixteen years up to the time when Christ began to preach, thirty years passed, because Christ was thirty years old when he began to preach. Now thirty and sixteen make forty-six years, and so that saying is verified about Christ.

Morally [in the moral sense of scripture], it must also be noted that this verb, "Destroy [Solvite]" is the word of Christ and this is said to confessors. Where it must be known that each man, as long as he stays in mortal sin, if he does not wish to repent is the dwelling of a demon. So it is said of Mary Magdalene, (Cf. Mk 13:9) that the Lord had cast out of her seven demons, not that she was a demoniac, but that she had seven mortal sins. And since a particular demon corresponds to each sin, therefore seven demons dwelt in her. So there is a rule, since a sinner is the habitation of a demon. But when a man has contrition for sins, and a proposal of not returning to the vices, the demon flees, and then the man is made the temple and habitation of God, according to the word of the Apostle Paul, "Know you not, that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1Cor 3:16). When the sinner is with contrition and the purpose of amendment then he is the temple of God. And so Christ says to confessors, "Destroy this temple, because 'whatsoever you shall loose on earth, it shall be loosed also in heaven.' And when you destroy [it], after three days I will raise it up, namely by the three works of penance. And the first day is the affliction of the body. The second is spiritual prayer. The third is fraternal almsgiving. And behold these three by which it is raised according to the word of the prophet, "Come, and let us return to the Lord: For he has taken us, and he will heal us: he will strike, and he will cure us. He will revive us after two days: on the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight," (Hos 6:1-3). "He will strike," through contrition. And this is the second part.

LUMINOUS KNOWLEDGE

We come to the third part in which is shown the luminous knowledge of Jesus Christ, when it is said in the theme, "For he knew what was in man," (Jn 2:25). Thus you can know the face of man, but the heart of man only God knows. And so it is said through the Prophet, "The heart is perverse above all things, and unsearchable, who can know it? I am the Lord who searches the heart and prove the reins: who give to every one according to his way," (Jer 17:9-10).

This is shown in the gospel where it says: "Now when he was at Jerusalem, at the pasch, upon the festival day, many believed in his name, seeing his signs which he did. But Jesus did not trust himself unto them, for that he knew all men, and because he needed not that any should give testimony of man: for he knew what was in man," (Jn 2:23-25). The evangelist says there that many believed in his name; he does not say that the believed in him, but in his name which is Jesus, i.e. Savior. Nevertheless he did not trust himself to them, for he knew what was in man.

And here two doctrines should be noted. The first is real, which touches us religious and ecclesiastics, because it is said that Christ did not trust himself to them, that is share [communicare]. And the reason was, lest he be despised by them. For he had bodily passions like we have. And because perhaps they might have said, "He drinks and eats like us, and they might have despised him, and so he chose not to share himself with them. And already some Jews had said, "Behold a man that is a glutton and a wine drinker," (Mt 11:19),

and these defects he assumed out of love of us, and so he did not entrust himself to them. See, then, this example to us clergy, because we should pull back from the laity, lest we scandalize them, and so we do not share ourselves much with the laity. We ought therefore to be like paintings [imagines]. For if you stand at a distance, the paintings appear beautiful, but if you come close, you see streaks and stains [virgulae et maculae], and then you hate it. So you clergy, beware lest you share too much with the laity, lest they see the stains in you, for too much familiarity breeds contempt.

And listen to a story about this. In Avignon there was a certain truly devout religious. It happened that he was invited to dinner by a certain burgher, a prosperous businessman. He was a good friend and had asked him often. Although the friar preferred not to accept, he asked his prior for permission to go, and it was granted. Another burgher was also invited. The religious, who had fasted strictly for three days on bread and water, dined heartily, and filled up his belly with chicken and good wine, red and white. Then, afterwards, at table, the other burgher said to his dining companion when the friars [fratres] departed, what do these friars do now, because I, if I had my wife at my side would be all over her [raperent]. And he was scandalized in dining with this religious, and perhaps that brother had not even sinned venially. Therefore, you should be like paintings [imagines], because Jesus did not entrust himself to the Jews. And so it is said in 2 Cor 6: "Go out from among them, and be separate, says the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing. And I will receive you; and I will be a Father to you; and you shall be my sons," (2 Cor 6:17-18).

The second doctrine touches the laity, for the evangelist says next that he did not entrust himself to them who believed in his name – he did not say, that they believed in him – because such belief can happen without grace. But Christ communicates himself to those who believe in him, namely through formed faith, through a good life, through grace, when they receive communion at Easter, then to those who believe in this way, Christ ought to be given over, otherwise it would have been better to swallow red-hot iron. So the Apostle Paul says, "But let a man prove himself: and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of the chalice. For he who eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks judgment to himself," (1Cor 11:28-29), where the Gloss from St. Ambrose says, "Those receiving communion unworthily shall be so punished, as if they had killed Christ with their own hands. If therefore you are well prepared, he shall communicate himself with you, here through grace, and in the future through glory.