

A693_Monday of Holy Week

Sermon of St. Vincent Ferrer O.P. – The Feast at Bethany (John 12:1-28)

“A voice therefore came from heaven: I have both glorified it,” (Jn 12:28)

In this holy Gospel just read briefly I've found four great honors for our Lord Jesus Christ, and so there are four points.

First through special delight,

Second through intellectual wonder,

Third through special devotion,

Fourth through celestial speech. Of the fourth honor the theme speaks, “A voice came from heaven saying . . .”

I SPECIAL DELIGHT

As to the first honor given to Christ from special devotion, namely of the three saints and devout persons, that is Mary Magdalene, Martha, and Lazarus, the beginning of the Gospel speaks. “Six days before the Pasch, [Jesus] came to Bethany, where Lazarus had been dead, whom Jesus raised to life. And they made a dinner for him there and Martha served but Lazarus was one of them that were at table with him. Mary therefore took a pound of ointment of right spikenard, of great price, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair, and the house was filled with the odor of the ointment,” (Jn 12:1-3). Note here a good secret. “Six days before the Pasch,” because at that time the Pasch of the Jews was on Good Friday. Therefore this banquet was given for him on the previous Saturday, when Christ had left the town of Ephrem (cf. Jn 11:54f), which was near the desert, in which Christ had suffered many miseries, and with the apostles he went to Bethany, where Mary Magdalene, and Martha, and Lazarus were, and many other devout persons who had prepared a dinner (*coenam*) for Christ, not a lunch (*prandium*).

In fact, with great solicitude Martha, although she was the lady of the house, was ministering – she considered herself greatly honored that she could serve Christ. Even the angels considered it a grace and honor to serve him. Matthew: “The angels came and ministered to him,” (Mt 4:11).

Lazarus, also a noble man, poured water over his hands. Think how Christ utterly humble was treated by them. Then Christ blessed the meal saying, “The eyes of all hope in thee, O Lord,” (Pa 144:15). This blessing comes from Christ, to the apostles, and from the apostles to the martyrs, and then to us. And when they took their places at table, Lazarus wanted to serve, but Christ would have none of it, but wished him to eat. Therefore the Gospel says that Lazarus was one of those seated at table.

Now we all know what Martha was doing, because she was serving, and Lazarus, he was eating. But, Mary Magdalene, what was she doing? How was she serving Christ? John says about this, since the others were serving him, she took precious ointment just as she had done when she was converted in the house of Simon the Leper, and washed the feet of Christ with tears. She did not want rose water. And just as she wept at her conversion out of contrition of sins, and now she wept out of compassion for Christ saying “O you who sustain the whole world, and step forward humbly taking on heavy burdens,” etc. and with that ointment she anointed the feet of Jesus, and dried them with her hair, which previously she had carried like relics. And John said, that the whole “house was filled with the odor of the ointment,” (John 12:1-3). Behold, the first honor.

Morally. Just as then Christ six days before the Passover came to Bethany, where they held for him the aforesaid feast, so from this day, on which this gospel is read up to the feast of Easter, there are six days. Today Christ came into Bethany, that is "into an obedient person," who comes in repentance. Bethany is translated as "the house of obedience." And so the person who obeys the first precepts of Christ saying, "do penance," (Mt 4:17) is called "Bethany," in whom Christ comes through grace. And a dinner is prepared for Christ. Note also here how some give Christ a lunch [*prandium*] and a dinner [*cenam*]. Some give him neither a lunch nor a dinner. Some give a lunch only, but not a dinner. And there are some who give only a dinner. Penitents give Christ lunch who, in the morning, that is in the beginning of Lent, begin to do penance; and also give him a dinner, when they continue it up to the end of Lent, because penance is the food and refreshment of Christ. John 4: "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me," (Jn 4:34). And he speaks about penance and the conversion of sinners. He says to those who gave him lunch and dinner, "You are they who have continued with me in my temptations. And I give to you, as my father has given to me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table, in my kingdom," (Lk 22:28-29). Note "you...have continued," that is, you have remained persevering, and have stood "in my temptations." He says that our temptations are his, because they are effectively his, which he gave to us for the increase of merit, but they are ours subjectively and patiently.

Some people give to Christ neither a lunch nor dinner, excusing themselves from penance, etc. To these Christ says, "behold my servants shall eat, and you shall be hungry: behold my servants shall drink, and you shall be thirsty: behold my servants shall rejoice, and you shall be confounded," (Isa 65:13-14). And so at least you should give him dinner, that is, the end of Lent. There are some who gave him lunch but did not give him dinner because now there is lacking to them all heart at the end of Lent. Such are they who so excuse themselves falsely. They shall be excluded from the dinner of Christ. About which Luke: "I say to you, that none of those men who were invited shall taste of my supper," (Lk 14:24). About which the Apocalypse: "Blessed are they that are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb," (Rev 19:9). Those however who have not given Christ lunch in the beginning of Lent at least should give him dinner, at the end, this Holy Week.

But it is necessary that there be there three persons, namely Martha, who is interpreted as irritating or provoking, and signifies contrition which is nothing but irritation, and the provocation of sorrow for sins. Second it is necessary that Lazarus be there, who is interpreted as helped by God. Behold oral confession. The reason is, just as Lazarus who was dead, by God's help rose from the dead to life, so the spirit which lies dead because of sin in the tomb of the body, by God's aid is raised from mortal sin to a life of grace in confession. Therefore holy Scripture says about those who confess well, and clearly, "their throat is an open sepulcher," (Ps 5:11). Third, it is necessary that Mary Magdalene be there with an alabaster vase of precious ointment, namely medicinal bodily affliction, because it heals all wounds of our sins. Therefore with this precious ointment we anoint the feet of Christ. His head is the beginning of Lent. his body, the middle time, but his feet are the last week, so the entire house is filled with the odor of the ointment." Hence the apostle says: "Now thanks be to God, who always make us makes us to triumph in Christ Jesus, and manifests the odor of his knowledge by us in every place." (2 Cor 2:14). Because we are the good odor of Christ.

Note the complaining of Judas saying, "Why this waste? Can it not be sold for much and given to the poor,?" Would that there be no one among us like Judas, who about the precious ointment of corporeal affliction and penance, murmurs, and says, "Truly it would have been better to give alms than to fast." You like Judas are saying, why this waste? Almsgiving is good, but in your case, bodily penance is better. So just as a wounded man who fears the lancing his wounds, and says to the doctor, "Go away. No treatment," is not healed; so also the sinner who says, "It is better that we give alms," is wrong. The wound of lust, from the plague of luxury, is not cured except through a dose of bread and

water. Same for the glutton who excuses himself from fasting saying, "I have given alms."

II INTELLECTUAL WONDER

The second honor given today to Christ comes through intellectual wonder. It should be noted, that all the Jews gather in Jerusalem for the sake of the festival of the Passover. And when the people heard of such a great miracle as the raising of Lazarus, both public and notorious, and of such a baron, whose death the whole country knew about, out of admiration for such a miracle John says, that the people were coming not just for Jesus sake, but that they might see Lazarus whom he raised from the dead. About which Augustine says that he was narrating wonders which he had seen from another world, namely, how the all the damned are who die without faith in Christ. He was telling also of the diversity of the punishments of hell. Also about purgatory. Also about children dying in original sin. And even about paradise, about the orders of angels, that those from hell behold the blessed. Also the Gloss says that the disciples of Christ were seeking many things from him about the other world. All wished to see Lazarus, and to hear him, and from his words many were converted to Christ, for which reason the leaders of the Jews were thinking about also killing Lazarus. And because of this miracle the people of the city of Jerusalem received Christ coming on Palm Sunday with such honor and solemnity saying: "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord," (Jn 12:13).

Note here a hidden allegory. Because Lazarus was raised by Christ after four days. Therefore out of wonder the people wish to give him honor. Second, note here four days from the beginning of the world up to the end, namely up to the day of judgment:

- 1)the first day of the law of nature;
- 2)the second of the law of Scripture;
- 3)the third of the law of grace;
- 4)the fourth of the law of wrath, on which days Lazarus, that is mankind, lies dead.

The first day of the law of nature was from Adam up to Moses. It is called the law of nature, because then peoples rule themselves by their natural intellect, because then they did not have books, nor doctors, nor masters. And they were called "days" because of the brightness of the intellect. Of this day the Apostle says, "For when the Gentiles, who have not the law, do by nature those things that are of the law, these having not the law are a law to themselves. Who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness to them," (Rom 2:14-15). Behold, the first day.

The second day, namely of the written law, was from Moses to Christ, and lasted more than 1,500 years. And then the peoples were governing themselves, not only by natural intellect, but also through Scriptures which God wished to give, because the peoples governed themselves badly only by their natural intellect. Therefore this day was brighter than the first day. Proverbs: "Because the commandment is a lamp, and the law of light, and reproofs of instruction," that is of vice," (Prov 6:23). Behold the second day in which Lazarus that is mankind lay dead.

The third day, namely of the law of grace, is this day in which we now are, from Christ, and this day was necessary, because the law of Moses did not speak about the other world like those things which are said about paradise, about hell and purgatory. And we know what was, and what shall be. And so this day is brighter than aforesaid others. Of this day Christ says, "If a man walks in the day, he stumbles not, because he sees the light of this world," (Jn 11:9). Even on this day Lazarus, that is mankind, lies dead on earth because the general resurrection is not yet come.

The fourth day after this day of grace comes quickly and briefly, the day of law, of wrath, and of the

corruption of Antichrist, who corrupts, and destroys the whole law of Christ, about which David says, "Appoint, O Lord, a lawgiver"-- Gloss: the Antichrist-- "over them," (Ps 9:21). Hence the church [sings] "Day of wrath, that day....," (*Dies irae* Funeral Sequence), day of calamity, and of misery, etc. Even in this fourth day Lazarus, mankind, lies dead, corrupt and stinking, because the whole world shall be soiled with sins, and softness. But at the end of this day Christ comes in Bethany, that is in this world in which then his obedience shall be served, because at the death of Antichrist the whole world shall be converted to Christ. And just as in the resurrection of Lazarus he cried out saying, "Lazarus come forth," and immediately he arose, so he shall cry out then saying, "Arise ye dead! Come to judgment!" Then the good shall rise with palm branches in their hands in a sign of victory, which they had over the world through poverty, over the devil through humility, over their corruption through chastity, and they shall come before Christ, singing and saying, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord," (Jn 12:13). About this St. John says in the Apocalypse: "I saw a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and tribes, and peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne, and in the sight of the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands: and they cried out," (Rev 7:9). "Blessed is he who comes," etc.

III SPECIAL DEVOTION

The third honor done to Christ comes through special devotion about which the Gospel says: "There were certain Gentiles among them, who came up to adore on the festival day. These therefore came to Philip,... saying: 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus.' Philip comes and tells Andrew. Then Andrew and Philip told Jesus. But Jesus answered them, saying: 'The hour is come, that the Son of Man should be glorified. Amen, amen, I say to you, unless the grain of wheat falling to the ground dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it brings forth much fruit,'" (Jn 12:20-25).

Tell how the Gentiles, that is *geniti tales* [so begotten], because they were begotten uncircumcised, nevertheless out of devotion came to worship in Jerusalem, just like the wise, and the discrete, seeing that the Jews adored one God. Therefore, secretly, they came to Jerusalem to adore God. Many indeed were coming to see Christ because of the great fame of his miracles. And they said to Philip the apostle whom they first came upon, "Sir we wish to see Jesus." Did they never see him when he was preaching? They were saying this because they wanted to speak with him, because one does not speak with someone unless out of a great need. And so he said, "I have spoken openly to the world: I have always taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, where all the Jews, and in secret I have spoken nothing," (Jn 18:20).

Philip however told Andrew, and together both spoke to Christ, who replied to them saying, "The hour is come, that the Son of Man should be glorified," (v. 23) that is, recognized by the Gentiles and pagans that he is the true Son of God. The apostles however then understood, that he would be glorified soon. Christ declared to them the time and the manner, saying, "Amen, amen I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falling to the ground," etc. (Jn 12:24). Then he compared himself to a grain of wheat falling from heaven to earth, to the virginal womb in the incarnation, that if he would not have died through his passion, he alone would remain saved. If however he would have died, he would bear much fruit, of redemption, and salvation. Note, those Gentiles wishing to see Jesus spoke to Philip, and Philip spoke to Andrew, and both together spoke to Christ. Why did Philip not speak to Christ since he was such a disciple and a friend to Christ just as Andrew? Response, to show three grades which exists in the vision, and knowledge of God etc.

- First through physical knowledge;
- Second, through theological science;
- Third, through beatific understanding.

The first grade of vision and knowledge of God is through physical knowledge, signified by Philip, which means the mouth of a lamp. Such is the science of philosophy, which has a big mouth in relationship to the lamp, yet inside it has little light, that is little knowledge about God, because it knows only that there is one first cause, and one prime mover. And so the philosophers in schools prove that God is one, and they were adoring idols in the temples. Philosophical knowledge has a large mouth for disputing, arguing, and responding. And so the Gentiles came to Philip, that is to philosophy, that they might see Christ, and so they knew little about God, – a little old woman who knows the *Credo, I believe in God* etc. knows more now about God than all the philosophers of antiquity. And so it was necessary that Philip, the philosopher, come to Andrew, which means decorous, which signifies theology, or a theologian, beautiful, and decorous, who is without stain of error, because the science of theology is pure truth.

But neither does this suffice, because in this world we see God only in the figure, and in a mirror. "We see now through a glass in the dark manner, but then face to face," (1 Cor 13:12). The mirror stands for creatures which represent the creator, for example, the earth with trees represents the power of God. Water which washes and cleans, represents the mercy of God, which bathes and washes [us] from sins, and so for the rest. And "in a dark manner," that is through a figure. Therefore neither Philip, nor Andrew suffice; neither the science of philosophy, nor of theology suffice for seeing God clearly, but it is necessary to go to Christ through beatific glory in Paradise, and then we shall see him face to face, just as he is.

So it happened that the Gentiles said, "We wish to see Jesus," like the book of glory having two pages, divinity, and humanity, in which consists all glory. "We know, that, when he shall appear, we shall be like to him: because we shall see him as he is," (1 Jn 3:2), where there is no mirror nor any image, but clear and open vision.

IV CELESTIAL SPEECH

The fourth honor, one greater than the others, was through celestial speech, because God the Father had spoken to Christ while the people were listening, and this when Christ having raised his eyes to heaven said, "Father, glorify your name. And a voice came from heaven saying, I have both glorified it, and I will glorify it again." (Jn 12:28). Note, "I have... glorified it," that is, clearly I have demonstrated that you are my Son, namely in miracles performed through you, in which my divinity is shown, and, "I will glorify it again," namely in the passion, resurrection, ascension, and in the general judgment. "The multitude therefore that stood and heard, said that it thundered. Others said: an angel spoke to him," (Jn 12:29). To them Christ said, "This voice came not because of me, but for your sakes," (Jn 12:30), because Christ already knew the will of the Father, for as God, the will of the Father and the Son is the same. Even as man he knew the will of the Father, but that voice came for their sake that they might believe in the Son of God. About that voice David had already said, "The voice of the Lord is upon the waters: the God of Majesty has thundered," (Ps 28:3). Seven times he said "The voice of the Lord," for the sake of seven glorifications [*clarificationes*] of the Son of God.

1. First, he says, "The voice of the Lord is upon the waters," (v. 3) namely of the tears of Christ, who has died, weeping. Hebrews: "Asian offering... with a strong cry and tears..., was heard for his reverence," (Heb 5:7). Over the waters of the Virgin Mary and of the other devout persons he was glorified, because the sun was hidden. (Cf. Lk 23:45)

2. Second: "The voice of the Lord is in power," (v. 4) because of the glorification which he had in hell, when he said, "Lift up your gates," (Ps 23:7, 9) because by divine power immediately the gates had

been opened. Also he was glorified in limbo, in which the holy fathers there awaiting Christ saw his divinity most clearly.

3. Third: "The voice of the Lord in magnificence," (v. 4). Behold the glorification of the resurrection, because he arose magnificently, and liberated the holy fathers.

4. Fourth: "The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars," (v. 5), that is. the apostles, higher and greater than all the other saints, but they had been late and stubborn in believing in the resurrection of Christ, as is clear with Thomas. But Christ broke this hardness, when he appeared to them, and they firmly believed his resurrection.

5. Fifth: "The voice of the Lord divides the flame of fire," (v. 7) namely of the Roman emperors, who issued edicts, laws and ordinations against Christians. But this flame of furor was divided in the conversion of the Emperor Constantine.

5. Sixth: "The voice of the Lord shakes the desert," (v. 8) that is the empyreal heaven, which is called a desert. Luke 15, in the parable of the sheep which Christ left in the desert, that is, in heaven, because the heaven is deserted of bad angels and men. But when Christ ascended into heaven, the whole celebration of angels and men was full of joy and gladness.

7. Seventh: "The voice of the Lord prepares the stags," namely on the day of judgment when from heaven and from hell the souls shall leap up to receive their bodies in the general resurrection. Then when the final judgment has been given by Christ, together with flesh and soul the wicked shall fly into hell, but the good to the empyreal heaven. About this David speaks in the person of a good man, "Who has made my feet like the feet of harts: and who sets me upon high places," (Ps 17:34).