

Sermon of St. Vincent Ferrer – On Judas the Betrayer (Mk 14:21)

"It were better for him, if that man had not been born," (Mk 14:21).

In Mark 14, and in the passion of the Lord just read, this word is written. The given text offers great difficulty in theology, and so in the present sermon I wish to explain it. But first let the Virgin Mary be hailed.

"It were better for him, if that man had not... etc." For the explanation of this text, and as an introduction to the material to be preached, it must be known that according to the diversities and conditions of sins and vices there ought to be diverse manners of corrections. Just as according to the diversity and the condition of illness and disease there are diverse medicines, because one medicine would not be good for all illnesses. So neither one manner of correction for all sins.

Note therefore the three kinds of sins, or diseases. Some sin out of ignorance, thinking to do good, because if they knew themselves to do evil, they would not do it. Such people need the medicine of knowledge, namely that it be made clear to them the evil which they do, and they are corrected. Hence for the plague of ignorance, the proper medicine is a dose [*scopa*] of knowledge. And this way Christ used for the apostle Paul, who was sinning out of ignorance persecuting Christ and the Christians, about which he himself says, "who before, my conversion, was a blasphemer, and persecutor, and insolent. But I obtained the mercy of God, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief," (1 Tim 1:13). But I was cured by Christ with the medicine of knowledge, and when thrown down on the ground, "a light from heaven shined round about him," (Acts 9:3). And just as a brightness appeared outside, so also he was illuminated inwardly in the soul. And so converted he said, "Lord, what would you have me to do?" (Acts 9:6)

Some sin from weakness or impotence, because they indeed wish to avoid sins, but given the occasion they sin, either out of fleshly love, or physical fear, because they are fragile, and such need the medicine of the love of God, that by his love they be corrected from that sin. In this way Christ corrects the Peter the apostle who sinned by denying Christ, not from ignorance, because he had said, "you are Christ, the Son of the living God," (Mt 16:16), but out of weakness and impotence, out of temporal fear, and the fear of death. Luke says that, "The Lord, turning, looked upon Peter," (Luke 22:61), and he drew him to repentance, because "going out, he [Peter] wept bitterly," (v. 62).

Some however sin not from ignorance, nor from weakness, but out of their own malice and wickedness of heart. Such need another medicine, namely the fear of damnation, and the fear of judgment, to remove the malice and iniquity from a heart fearing eternal damnation, so that the correction of divine grace can enter into the heart. In this way Christ attempted to correct Judas Iscariot, who sinned not out of ignorance, – because he well knew Christ to be true God and man from the miracles which he had seen – nor from weakness, but from his own malice and iniquity, and the outpouring of ointment which Christ allowed, because it was not sold so that he could have stolen a third from it. Christ however in the correction of Judas, took up the medicine of the fear of damnation for healing the heart of Judas, that he might be corrected. But he was unwilling to correct his free will, but said, "One of you who eats with me shall betray me. But they began to be sorrowful, and to say to him one by one: is it I? He said to them: one of the twelve who dips his hands with me in the dish... woe to that man by whom the Son of Man shall be betrayed," (Mk 14:18-21). Behold how he sought to heal the heart of Judas, but

there was so much malice in his heart, that the grace of the Holy Spirit was not able to enter. For few are those converted who sin through such malice. It is otherwise with those who sin from ignorance, or weakness. Then Christ, to frighten Judas lest he sin, spoke the words of the theme, "It were better for him, if that man had not been born," (Mk 14:21), and so the theme is clear.

Note, that in sacred Scripture there are found three births:

the first is the birth of internal formation,
the second, the birth of exterior production,
the third, the birth of adoption from above.

About each of these the proposed theme can be verified, "It were better for him..."

I. THE BIRTH OF INTERNAL FORMATION

The first birth is that of internal formation, which is called by doctors the birth in the womb, because it is the teaching of theology in the Gloss on Leviticus 12.c. That after a woman conceives, then the body is formed in the uterus, and if it is masculine, the body has been formed in 40 days, and then the soul is created, and when created is infused; if feminine, 80 days, because it is of a cooler complexion. Such a formation of the body, and creation, and infusion of the soul in sacred Scripture is called the birth in the womb [nativitas in utero]. It is similar to a nut planted in the ground, and when in the ground, it swells, or is inflated, I speak commonly, it has been born already, although it does not yet appear above the ground. The same of the offspring in the womb of the mother, that when her belly swells, then the woman is said to be pregnant, and that is called the interior birth. Authority, Matthew, 1, that Joseph was astonished, and while debating within himself about the pregnancy of the Virgin Mary, his spouse, "The angel of the Lord appeared to him in his sleep, saying: Joseph, son of David, fear not to take to yourself Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her, is of the Holy Spirit," (Mt 1:20). See here the birth of interior formation.

If we wish to speak about this birth, the theme puts it well, "It were better for him etc." Judas, "if he had not been born," that is formed in the womb of his mother, that never would his body ever have been formed, nor his soul created. And according to this understanding the Gloss says here: "It would have been entirely better for Judas never to have existed, then to have been damned." But one can argue against the Gloss, "It is better to be something than nothing. But to be damned is to be something, because to be a substance or to be human includes that it is something good, and to be nothing includes nothing, therefore it is badly stated. Many reason this way, but they are wrong. In response this case is posited: What would be better, either to have nothing in this world, or to have a castle, which is worth 1000 florins of profit every year, but for this castle from its earnings there must be paid 100,000 florins each year under penalty of death? Simply speaking, it is better to have a castle than not to have one. But it is much better to have nothing, than to have a castle with such a burden and obligation. Again simply speaking, to be something is better than to be nothing, but to be with such a burden and obligation, namely of eternal damnation, to be always in the wrath of God and in punishment it is not better to be, because much greater is this evil to be eternally damned, than this to be a substantial good only. And to be nothing is not evil, but to be damned is a greater evil that it is able to be. Because of this Christ said to Judas, damning, "It were better etc." Note, good, because of the privation of evil, of guilt and punishment, etc. And it agrees with what is written saying, "Better is death than a bitter life: an everlasting rest, than continual sickness," (Sir 30:17). Note "better is death" which gives not to be, "than a bitter life," namely of the damned, "and everlasting rest." It does not speak here of the rest of glory, but it speaks according to philosophy, which says that quiet is the cessation or the privation of motion, and so eternal rest, that is, not to be, which is the cessation of punishment, therefore it is better not to be, "than continual sickness." Therefore St. John says that the

damned desired death, and they yearn not to exist, but they cannot die. "And in those days men shall seek death, and shall not find it: and they shall desire to die, and death shall fly from them," (Rev 9:6).

Morally. But here note the fact of how hard and how difficult the penalty of hell is; you should take care lest you go there for a time, because in the will consists your own free will, that it is not forced by God to this or to that. "God made man from the beginning, and left him in the hand of his own counsel." (Sir 15:14). If it is said, "therefore we shall all go to heaven, because, indeed, we all want to go." The response, that you lie through the medium of your mouth [per medium gulae], because although you say with your mouth that you want Paradise, nevertheless by deed you do and say something else. So a traveler who says he is going to Strasbourg verbally, but nevertheless in fact he takes the way to Cologne, such a one lies and is deceived. And so the proud says to himself that he wants to go to paradise, yet in fact he takes the way to hell. The same can be said about the other sins. And so Isaiah: "This is the way," namely to paradise, humility, or mercy, etc., "Walk in it: and go not aside neither to the right hand, nor to the left," (Isa 30:21). Judas however from the sin of avarice went to hell, because out of avarice he sold Christ, like the avaricious, usurers, simoniacs, thieves etc. for Judas asks, "What will you give me, and I will deliver him to you?" (Mt 26:15).

II THE BIRTH OF EXTERIOR PRODUCTION

The second birth is that of exterior production. And this is the most commonly used sense. Example: when a nut appears visibly above the ground, then it is said to be born. The same for a woman after she gives birth, it is said that a child is born. John 16: "A woman when she has brought forth the child, she remembers no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world," (Jn 16:20). It does not say "in the womb," because already it is outside. If we wish to speak of this birth, the theme is still true. "It is good for him," Judas, "if he had not been born," in the world, because it would have been better for him if he had died in the womb of his mother, for then he would have had only original sin. And the teaching of the Theologian [Peter Lombard] in 2 Sent. dist 33, q.2, art. 1, "The mildest of punishment is given for original sin, because they suffer only punishment of the damned, that is, not to see God; but they do not have punishment of the senses." St. Thomas says in 2 Sent., dist. 32, q., art. 2, That those children who die only with original sin, have great consolations for themselves, debating among themselves about philosophy, which they know better than philosophers in this world know, nor are they saddened, nor does it displease them that they do not have paradise. Just as a peasant is not saddened because he is not the king of the Romans, for he well knows that it is not fitting for him. Nor are you sad that you do not have wings for flying, because it is not fitting for you to fly like an eagle. So therefore those children are not sad that they do not have the kingdom of God, because they know that it is not owed to them. If they were saddened they would be experiencing sensible punishment. So therefore it would have been good for Judas, that he had never been born into this world, but that he had died in the womb of his mother, because then he would have died only with original sin.

And so it is now with those children, offspring of Christians, Jews, and Muslims, who die only with original sin. Original sin is not a sin committed by a creature It is received, like a statue of gold or silver which falls into the mud, so the soul, made in the image of God, is destined for a place in the temple of glory, but it falls into the mud of carnal generation. If God would have made man some other way, he would not have had original sin. And so since it is not a sin committed by a creature, God does not give to a creature a felt punishment from that sin alone. But, from the fact that he died with that sin he shall never see God, although he may approach the gate of Paradise seeking entrance, because he has never committed another sin. And Christ replies, "Look at the sin which you bear." He shall reply, "Lord I have not done it." To which Christ answers, "And so I do not give you a painful punishment, but because you have a stain, you shall go to limbo with the others." Or, if you wish, it is like a king

who committed a castle most strong and impregnable to his knight, who like a traitor, hands over the castle to his enemy. At first the king does not wish to kill the treasonous knight, although he can, but he swears that never will any of his kind enter into his court. And so it happened. If it is asked why should the sons of the soldier not yet conceived, born nor begotten, be punished? Response. Because they are the children of the traitor. But because they never did anything wrong, therefore the King does not inflict any punishment, but he does not want them in his court. So God in the beginning of the world built a strong and impregnable castle of earthly paradise, which according to St. Bede ascended up to the lunar heaven, for the knight Adam, and Eve, his wife that they might keep it. "And the Lord God to man, and put him into the paradise for pleasure, to dress it, and keep it," (Gen 2:15). And on that very day they handed it over to the devil, God's enemy, by consenting to sin. For this reason God swore that the children of Adam never would enter his courts, or kingdom. And so scriptural authority: "For they have not known my ways: so I swore in my wrath that they shall not enter into my rest," (Ps 94:11). If it is said, "And are we not the children of Adam?" I say, no. Since before baptism we had been the children of Adam, but in baptism we have become children of God and of mother Church. And so now generation in us has been changed. "He gave them power to be made the sons of God," (Jn 1:12). "The seed is the word of God," (Lk 8:11). And, "the Holy Spirit," Paul says, "gives testimony to our spirit, that we are the sons of God. And if sons, heirs also, heirs indeed of God, and joint heirs with Christ," (Rom 8:16-17). And so whoever dies before baptism cannot enter Paradise, because he is the son of Adam and Eve, to whom "I swore in my wrath, etc.," but because they were not in hell [*in perditione*], so he does not give them punishment of the senses. And so Job in the person of the damned says, "Why did I not die in the womb, why did I not perish when I came out of the belly? Why received upon the knees? Why suckled at the breasts? For now I should have been asleep and still." (Job 3:11-13). Note, "and still," namely with the other children in limbo, because in the hell of the damned there is no silence, but tumult and outcries of pain.

Morally. Note, those children dying with only original sin and existing in limbo, on one hand are reconciled [*regratiantur*] to God, because they are freed from the punishment of hell, and then the other part when they see the glories of the blessed they seek out God, and they cry out voicing seven accusations.

1. First, against their father and mother, if because of their fault they died without baptism. Some abused their wives, or beat them, and so they cause a miscarriage, so their offspring die without baptism. Indeed they demand justice from God.
2. Second, they cry out against foolish mothers, who when they feel that they are pregnant -- and they were well able to know within a month -- should have with great diligence guarded the treasure committed to them, lest it be lost by dancing or horseback riding. Like foolish women, they don't care.
3. Third, they cry out against widows, or nuns, or girls, or those married women who conceived not by their own husbands. They kill their offspring lest they be embarrassed, by taking medicines to kill the babies.
4. Fourth they demand justice from all who have consented in their death, namely doctors and pharmacists. Note that what a doctor of the king said to a nun who asked him, what should she do so as not to conceive. He replied, "Don't sleep with a man!" If a priest consents in the death of them, he becomes irregular.[automatically suspended from his office]
5. Fifth, they cry out against mothers who after giving birth postpone baptism for a long time, and sometimes they crush or smother the poor creature with their huge breasts. I'm speaking about nursing.
6. Sixth, they accuse priests or laity, who in danger [of the child's death] have the right to baptize, if they err or change the formula of baptism -- here demonstrate the form of baptizing.
7. The seventh accusation is, when a Christian sleeps with a Jew or Muslim, and conceives, and gives birth, and the child remains with the infidel, because the father does not care. Such shall rise on the day of judgment, thirty years old, and then they will recognize their parents and demand justice from God.

So beware! Then the damned will make this lament to God saying, "Why did you bring me forth out of the womb: O that I had been consumed that eye might not see me!" (Job 10:18).

III THE BIRTH BY ADOPTION FROM ABOVE

The third birth is by adoption from above. And this happens in baptism, in which the creature is adopted and legitimized, that he might gain the inheritance of paradise. Because it is not from the first birth, nor from the second does he acquire the right possessing paradise, but only from this third birth, about which Christ says, "Amen amen I say to you, unless a man be born again of water and the holy spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God," (Jn 3:5). About this birth is the theme, "it were better for him....," etc. that is, if he had never been baptized, in which he was adopted by Christ as a son. Moreover because of the ingratitude over such a grace given to him by Christ it would have been good for him if he had not been baptized by Christ, because from this he has a greater punishment., For when the life of a Christian is bad, he has a greater penalty of damnation than the infidel, who has not been baptized. Note the miracle story which is read in the Lives of the Fathers -- and the book has been approved by decree of the pope Gelasius -- about St. Macharius, who going out through the desert found a most very old skull of a certain dead man, and because spiritual persons immediately think spiritually -- otherwise of carnal persons -- so he thought about the soul of that skull saying: "If I knew that the soul of this fellow were in paradise, I would hold the skull as a relic; if in purgatory, I would pray for him; if in hell, I would like to know for what sin he is there." And while he was thinking this suddenly the soul was in the skull and spoke to him thus: "You ask, and so I shall reply to you." Then Macharius asked him, "What condition were you, Christian or pagan?" He replied, "I was a pagan." He asked, "Where are you?" He replied that he was damned eternally in hell. And he was deeper in hell than heaven is distant from earth. This is not understood as spacial distance, but through the immeasurability, or the immensity of punishment. He asked him whether there were some even deeper? He replied, "Yes, Jews." Reason, because they had the Scriptures and the prophets, and they did not believe. He asked whether there were some deeper than the Jews. He replied that there were, evil Christians and reprobates, who had received from God so many graces, who nevertheless denied God through evil deeds and blasphemies. And so because of their ingratitude they are deeper.

For our point, note here how the sin of ingratitude of Judas is great. Since Judas indeed had received from God so much grace, yet nevertheless he sold him. First, because he had remitted him all his sins from punishment and guilt, he forgave him the death of his father, king of Karioth, and the death of his father whom he killed, and the incest with his mother whom he had taken as a wife, as we find in the histories. (Cf. The story of Judas in [James of Voragine, The Golden Legend](#)). And he had explained to him knowledge for preaching, and the power of working miracles, and he made him his disciple, an apostle, the procurator of his team, he had baptized him, and had given him communion with the others. All these graces impute punishment to him. Therefore it would have been good for him if he had not been born, that is baptized.

And this agrees with the prophet David who speaking in the person of Christ said: "If my enemy had reviled me, I would truly have born with it. And if he who hated me had spoken the great things against me, I would perhaps have hidden myself from him. But you, a man of one mind, my guide, and my friend, who did take sweetmeats together with me in the house of God, we walked with consent. Let death come upon them, and let them go down alive into hell," (Ps 54:13-16), as if he were saying, in this world there is no punishment sufficient for you.

Morally, about this, "who did take sweetmeats together with me," note, about communion to which all are bound, even children 12 or 14 years of age, on Easter day [in die paschae]. About which day Paul

says "for Christ our pasch is sacrificed. Therefore let us feast," (1 Cor 5:7-8), by receiving communion. Some say, "Would it not be better to receive communion on Holy Thursday [in die Iovis sancta] on which this sacrament was instituted and a man is still in penitence? I respond, that the Decretals say "in paschal time,[in pascha]" because then we should receive communion, although it does not say "on Easter day" [in die paschae]. But what is understood by "Easter Day" is clear through the evidence given, because the pope who issued the Decretal *De facto opere*, declared that this decretal is understood to mean Easter day, because on Easter day he consecrates many hosts in the gold ciborium. For just as my voice enters into all your ears, so the Word of God the Father [enters] into every consecrated host. And on that day the Pope gives communion with his own hands to all who come to him. This practice declares how the pope understands this decretal. Note also about the letter of a cardinal sent to the inquisitor, which says this same as above, which is understood of Easter day.

It is like this parable of the King who won victory on the battlefield, and on that day of victory he wished to enter the castle of the city which he had besieged. So it is the same with Christ the King, who on Easter day surveys and claims in victory his stronghold, which he had entered on Good Friday. So on that day he wished to enter your castle, that is, into your soul. The honor is Christ's, but the usefulness is yours. Therefore on Easter day you should receive communion, unless from the advice of your confessor you ought to abstain for some reasonable cause. But no one by his own authority ought to change this, nor skip receiving communion on Easter. Women give an excuse saying that on Easter day they have to get dressed up etc. This excuse does [not] work, unless you understand that on Easter day you ought dress yourselves up in mortal sin. In such a case neither on Holy Thursday, nor on Easter ought you to receive communion, because you are in mortal sin, from the fact that you have a will to sin. But if you have dressed yourselves up without mortal sin, for everyone should dress up modestly according to his state, thinking that just as the priests dress up and prepare the altars, so you, in this respect, can to dress up and prepare your bodies like an altar for Christ. He however who unworthily receives communion – like Judas, who immediately after he received communion, betrayed Christ – that same ungrateful one shall be damned with Judas. "For he who eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks judgment to himself," i.e.,damnation,"not discerning," that is, recognizing, "the body of the Lord," (1 Cor 11:29).