

## **A712\_Wednesday of Holy Week**

### **A Sermon of St. Vincent Ferrer, O.P. – On the Medicine of Christ's Passion**

"For the wickedness of my people have I struck him," (Isa 53:8)

In the present sermon I want to declare some usefulness of the passion of Christ, because this requires time and the proposed theme. For explaining this text and introducing the material to be preached it must be understood that it is a rule, general and certain and true in holy theology, that all evils of punishment are from God. It is otherwise concerning the evils of guilt, because God cannot sin, but all evils of punishment God does, like illnesses, sorrows, troubles, deaths, etc. Therefore whatever is of punishment, is from God, and whatever there is of guilt, is from a creature.

And the reason why the evils of punishment are from God is that they are for the utility for healing and curing our souls. You should not believe, nor understand, that God rejoices or celebrates over our punitive evils, just as neither is the doctor pleased when he gives a bitter purgative, so neither is God when he gives painful punishments, or the bitter medicine of illnesses. Therefore it is necessary to bear up patiently, because that is how the wounds of sins are healed. This is contrary to those who impatiently bear the evils of punishment, and so are not cured, but damned by God, because of their impatience; they murmur against God. About whom Isaiah says in the person of God: "I am the Lord, and there is none else: I form the light, and create darkness, I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord who does all these things," (Isa 45:6-7). Also Amos: "Shall there be evil in a city, which the Lord has not done?" (Amos 3:6), asked as a question, to which the answer is "no." "Good things and evil, life and death, poverty and riches, are from God," (Sir 11:14). From this response holy persons who have some evil punishment, by strengthening themselves attribute all to God, as is clear in Job 1, who after he lost all his goods, consoled himself by saying: "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away: as it hath pleased the Lord so is it done," (Job 1:21). When however the text says that Satan and the enemies of Job worked those evils, he was still attributing all to God, knowing that all evils are from God, because the devil and enemies were only instrumental causes. So ought you to do in your tribulations, thinking how these tribulations are from God. Sins, however and defects are from us, and so about these we ought to grieve and be saddened.

To the proposal about the passion of Christ two things should be considered, namely guilt and punishment. Guilt was of Judas the traitor, of the Jews and Pilate, but punishment was from God as a medicine for our sins. This God the Father says in the theme: "For the wickedness of my people," for their healing, "have I struck him," (Isa 53:8). And how the passion of Christ with respect to punishment was arranged by God the Father, I found in sacred scripture, that the passion of Christ is the best medicine against sins, according to three kinds of medicines which doctors use, namely:

Curative medicine,  
Strengthening medicine, and  
Preventative medicine.

And for each of these the theme says: "For the wickedness of my people..." (Isa 53:8)

#### **I CURATIVE MEDICINE**

As to the first, I say, that the passion of Christ was medicine curative of our sins, because according to the teaching of St. Augustine, that never before the passion of Christ, or after, was anyone cured from sins except through the passion of Christ. If you ask, "How before?" because it had not yet happened?

I reply that just as the passion of Christ heals from sins now from the faith which we have for the passion of Christ already accomplished, so in ancient times they were healed from sins by faith in the passion of Christ yet to be accomplished. Which is noted in Matthew 21 where it reads that "The multitudes who went before," namely, before Christ, "and that followed, cried, saying: Hosanna to the son of David," (Mt 21:7). Those "who went before," like Adam, Noah, Abraham, etc.; and those "that followed," like all of us; we have salvation and healing from the passion of Christ. About this note the symbol in Numbers 21, about the bronze serpent made by Moses at the command of the Lord God as a medicine curative of the bites, in which it is clear that the Jews, for 1,500 years before the passion, already adored the cross.

From the serpent which tempted Eve, they entered into this world. And the bite of those serpents in the desert prefigured the bite of the tempting demons.

- And so if someone perceives himself to be dying from the [bite of] the serpent Leviathan through pride, pomp etc., if he wishes to be cured, he looks with his mind's eye upon Christ humbly hanging on the cross. In this way he is cured of the disease of pride, according to that in the Philippians: "For let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus," (Phil 2:5).

- Same when bitten by the serpent Mammon through avarice. Look upon Christ, naked and poor hanging on the cross. And so Micah: "Therefore [about this] will I lament and howl: I will go stripped and naked," (Mic 1:8) "About this" fact, namely the passion of Christ, "I will lament," my avarice, "and howl" by restitution; and consequently I shall go forward "stripped and naked."

- Also for the bite from the serpent Asmodeus through lust [luxuria]. Look upon Christ bloodied, hanging on the cross. Isaiah: "From the sole of the foot unto the top of the head, there is no soundness therein," (Isa 1:6). And you say, Lord, I want no delights in my body, because you, Lord, have borne all pains for me in your body.

- Same about the bite of the serpent Beelphegor through gluttony. Look on Christ hanging on the cross, how he suffered thirst, and how he drank of gall and vinegar.

- Same about the bite of the serpent Baalberith through anger. Gaze upon Christ hanging on the cross, how he prayed for those crucifying him, saying, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," (Lk 23:34).

- Same for the bite of the serpent Astaroth through sloth. Behold Christ on the cross, how he had diligence in the prayer which he offered, because he recited ten Psalms as Jerome says, 150 verses. Therefore look on the bronze serpent, Christ. Because just as the bronze serpent had the form of a serpent, and had nothing of the poison, so Christ is true man, he had nothing of the poison of sin, because he comes in the likeness of flesh, but not in the flesh of sin.

- Same for the sin of envy. Look on Christ hanging on the cross out of love and charity for us. Therefore he himself says, "This is my commandment, that you love one another, as I have loved you," (Jn 15:12). Behold how the passion of Christ is the medicine curative of our sins. Authority: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believes in him, may not perish; but may have life everlasting," (Jn 3:14-15). And 1 Peter, "Christ also once for our sins," for healing them, "died," (1 Pet 3:18). And thus God the Father [says] in the theme: "For the wickedness etc.," (Isa 53:8)

## II STRENGTHENING MEDICINE

Second, I say that the passion of Christ is strengthening medicine. Because just as a good doctor gives medicines for strengthening the sick person, so the passion of Christ is not only for those sick from sins as a curative medicine, but also for the healthy, that is the just, good and perfect persons as a strengthening medicine, that they might be strong against temptations. About this note the figure in Exodus 15 where it reads about the waters of Mara, about which when the children of Israel could not drink because of its bitterness, Moses prayed to the Lord. Who showed him a branch, saying that he should throw it into the waters. When he had thrown it into the waters, they were changed into sweet water. The text reads, that it was a figure of the passion of Christ, because the waters of Mara, the bitter waters, are the troubles of this world, the miseries, illnesses and temptations, etc. The wood sweetening these waters is the wood of the cross, which is hurled into the the waters of troubles, through the memory of the passion of Christ, by thinking about the troubles, pains and miseries which Christ bore in his passion. In this way you shall sweetly bear bitternesses and tribulations. Whence Gregory says: "If we recall the passion of the Lord, nothing is so hard and bitter that we cannot tolerate it with a calm spirit." So just as the passion of Christ is curative medicine of seven mortal sins, so it is strengthening medicine for the seven virtues.

- The first virtue of Faith, by thinking how in the passion of Christ the sun was obscured and the earth quaked, and rocks were split open, how the insensible creatures testified Christ to be true God and true man. In this way the virtue of faith is strengthened in the heart. In this way the Centurion was strengthened when he said, "Indeed this man was the son of God," (Mk 15:39).
- The second virtue, Hope, is strengthened in this way. If Christ had done so much, had suffered to save us, therefore we can surely hope, if I will to do penance for sins that he will remit sins for me, and will give me grace in the present age, and glory in the future. "He that spared not even his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how has he not also, with him, given us all things?" (Rom 8:32). So the virtue of hope is strengthened.
- Third, the virtue of Charity, by thinking that Christ ought to be loved by us, he who has been willing to suffer so much for us. Think if one of you were imprisoned, and already sentenced to die, if by someone he was freed, how much would he always love that person, as long as he lives. So we all were detained in the prison of sin, and sentenced to death and the pitchfork of hell. But a our friend comes, Christ, who frees us, because he alone wished to be hung up, lest someone believing in him, and obeying him be suspended on the pitchfork of hell. And so St. Bernard, "Above all things, it makes thee lovable to me, O Christ, the chalice of the passion which you have drunk, the work of our redemption."

Above all things O good Jesu give me grace to love thee. And by this thing he drew us most to his love. That is the chalice good Lord that thou hast drunken, which was the work our of redemption.

<http://www.catholic-forum.com/saints/golden110.htm> James of Voragine, The Golden Legend – the Passion

- Fourth, the four cardinal virtues are strengthened. First Prudence, by thinking, how Christ, prudently wanted to redeem the world, because although there were an infinite other ways to redeem, nevertheless he wished to preserve the mode of prudence, that just as the whole evil of the human race comes from a woman, a virgin engaged, saluted by an angel and informed. So the church sings, " Hoc opus nostrae salutis ordo depoposcerat, multiformis proditoris ars ut artem falleret,"

Hoc opus nostrae salutis  
ordo depoposcerat,  
multiformis proditoris  
ars ut artem falleret,  
et medelam ferret inde,  
hostis unde laeserat.

Such the order God appointed  
when for sin He would atone;  
to the serpent thus opposing  
schemes yet deeper than his own;  
thence the remedy procuring,  
whence the fatal wound had come.

**Pange lingua gloriosi, Venantius Fortunatus (530-609), stanza 3.**

And it is construed such, "The order of the work of our salvation he appointed," that "art", that is the prudence of Christ, "would deceive the art" that is the prudence of the devil, "the many-faced traitor."

- Fifth, Justice is strengthened. The Jews argue saying, "If Christ were God and man, why was it necessary for him to suffer? For he could well have given a general pardon just as sometimes some lords do." I respond, And it would not have been from his justice which is his essence, because in God virtues are not qualities added on just as in us, but virtues in God are his essence, Moreover in the redemption of mankind he wished to follow a process in which his infinite mercy was apparent, because he who is not obliged, wished to bear the burden, and also his infinite justice, because he wished to pay that price, sufficient and superabundant, because he willed to be seized and bound, that those believing in him and obeying might be saved, and so for the rest. Because the Lord is just, and Christ loves the just.

- Sixth, the virtue of temperance is strengthened, when by the example of the passion of Christ man restrains himself from good times [prosperis], pleasures, foods, and jewelry, by accepting just the necessities of the body, according to that in 1 Peter: "I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, to refrain yourselves from carnal desires," (1 Pet 2:11). He does not speak of necessities.

- Seventh, the virtue of Fortitude is strengthened, by thinking how Christ courageously suffered the nails, and the crown, yielding to the derisions of those crying out: "He saved others," (Mt 27:42), but he was strong even to death, giving us an example of standing bravely in the good life even up to death. According to Paul: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast and unmovable," (1 Cor 15:58). Behold how the passion of Christ is strengthening medicine. "Who his own self bore our sins in his body upon the tree: that we, being dead to sins, should live to justice," (1 Pet 2:24).

### **III PREVENTATIVE MEDICINE**

Third, I say that the passion of Christ is also a preservative medicine. Just as good doctors at the time of a plague makes some medicine preventative of illness, so Christ does by his passion. So many are the illnesses of sins both from the temptations of the devil, and the occasions of the world, as well as the inclinations of the flesh, that it is necessary that we have preventative medicine, which is the passion of Christ. For this, note the beautiful image of Jonah. The story tells of the prophet Jonah sailing, and endangered in the ship by a storm. How he said to the sailors, "Take me up, and cast me into the sea, and the sea shall be calm to you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you. . . And they took Jonah, and cast him into the sea, and the sea ceased from raging," (Jon 1:12,15). Note here the story, because he was a figure of the passion of Christ. Hence mankind was the ship. In the beginning it was just two members, Adam and Eve. Then it grew gradually and was enlarged. Galatians: "The fulness of the time was come," (Gal 4:4). But now already in the end of the world, we are crowded into the stern of the boat. And so of human nature it is said: "She is like the merchant's ship," (Prov 31:12), and "So is this great sea, which stretches wide its arms: there are creeping things without number: Creatures little and great. There the ships shall go," (Ps 103:25-26). The world is a

great sea in which there are many fortunes and storms. If therefore you wish to be preserved from the death of mortal sin, Jonah must be thrown into the sea. Jonah is translated "dove" and signifies Christ having dovelike simplicity, who is cast into the bitter sea by the memory of his passion, by thinking devoutly how, like Jonah, on the night of the passion he said, "Whom do you seek? If therefore you seek me. . .," (Jn 18:8) as if he were saying, "Throw me into the bitter sea, the bitter passion, and the sea will calm for you, for those abstaining from sin, thinking how and how much I have suffered." In this way man is restrained from sins and preserved from the death of guilt and Gehenna. See how the passion of Christ is preventative medicine. Therefore Pope Leo says: "Christian, acknowledge your dignity, and becoming a partner in the Divine nature, refuse to return to the old baseness by degenerate conduct. . .[Remember] because your purchase price is the blood of Christ," (Pope Leo the Great, Sermon 21 for Christmas).

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Christian, acknowledge your dignity, and becoming a partner in the Divine nature, refuse to return to the old baseness by degenerate conduct. Remember the Head and the Body of which you are a member. Recollect that you were rescued from the power of darkness and brought out into God's light and kingdom. By the mystery of Baptism you were made the temple of the Holy Ghost: do not put such a denizen to flight from you by base acts, and subject yourself once more to the devil's thralldom: because your purchase money is the blood of Christ, because He shall judge you in truth Who ransomed you in mercy, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

[Pope St. Leo the Great - Sermon 21 - Christmas](#)