

St. Vincent Ferrer, O.P. – Sermon on Pentecost (2)

John 14:27-29 Douay transl.

27 Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, do I give unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be afraid. 28 You have heard that I said to you: I go away, and I come unto you. If you loved me, you would indeed be glad, because I go to the Father: for the Father is greater than I.

" Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you," (Jn 14:27).

If you wish to think and diligently ponder the whole life of Christ from its beginning, from his birth up to the passion, among other virtues, he especially preached and wished there to be peace among Christians. And it can be stated such, he, at his birth wanted the angels to sing a new song, as is the custom of dominions, namely "Glory to God in the highest; and on earth peace to men of good will.," (Lk 2:14). In which it is shown how pleasing peace is to him.

If we look to his public life, when he was an adult and going about preaching and he entered the cities, towns, castles and homes, the his manner greeting and also his disciples, was to say "Peace be with you," as is stated by the evangelists. He does not just say "Good health!", or "Good day!", but "Peace!", in which is found all good. To the apostles and disciples and to others following him he said "Have peace among you," (Mk 9:49). Also, when he wished to send his disciples to preach he said to them: "And when you come into a house, salute it, saying: Peace be to this house," (Mt 10:12). On the night of the passion, about to leave his disciples, he wished them peace as his legacy. So the theme says: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you," etc. If one of the apostles had said to him, "Lord, when some lord dies, he leaves something to his own," etc., "also when a father dies, he leaves an inheritance to his children. Therefore you, who now wish to die for our salvation, etc, leave something for us." He replies, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you." Clearly, it is our sermon's theme.

Now I intend to explain what peace this is, and in what does it consist. I have come to see that it is threefold. First is ethical peace: personal, in oneself. Second, economic, i.e. domestic peace. Third is political peace, universal. The words are from the philosophers, and about this the theme says "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you," etc.

PERSONAL PEACE

First I say, is when a man has peace with himself, when the soul and body, spirit and flesh are in harmony. This is indeed difficult, to reconcile those two enemies, between which naturally there is war, for what one wants, displeases the other. Do you wish to understand how great this war is? Did you ever see someone tortured, stretched up by a rope, dragged down by a weight? Isn't that a great punishment or war? Each of us has such a war. The soul insofar as its nature is spiritual draws us upward. It wishes to contemplate, etc. But the weight of the flesh draws us down to worldly pleasures,

delights and corruptions. About this war scripture says, "For the flesh lusts against the spirit: and the spirit against the flesh," (Gal 5:17).

We need to see how we can make peace in this war. I say that it can happen in two ways, either that the soul humiliates itself and yields to the flesh and to all its pleasures, or the opposite. The first way is bad and reprobated. It is against God and reason and nature. It is as if a noble and generous lady would be at war against her maid, a servant, vile and unclean, and to establish peace that the lady were to subject herself to the servant in all things. This is wicked. So Bernard says "It is not fitting that the lady be made a servant, nor that the servant be in charge." It's the same with a noble and generous soul of spiritual substance, if it would be subject to its fleshly servant. Such peace would not be good, because it is not fitting that the lady be made a servant.

Therefore it is necessary that this peace happen the other way round, that the flesh, like a servant be humbled and subjected to the lady, the soul. This happens when a person by fasting, vigils and other hardships [asperitatibus] humbles the flesh, because the flesh like the slave resists the lady, but when it is wearied enough, as if exhausted [lassa], it is subjected to the soul. Penance was invented for this, to make personal peace within yourself. And this way of making peace is good and reasonable, and what God wishes. So the holy man Job said: "Your tabernacle is at peace," (Job 5:24).

But many do the opposite. They do not know to keep up this war between the soul and flesh, and wishing to be at peace, yield to the flesh. Do you wish to know how it is sinful? There was a certain king having a daughter dear to him, to whom he wished to leave the whole of his kingdom. She was just like her father, like one egg to another. It happened that this king wished to go to the Holy Land, to visit the shrines. And he entrusted to a knight his daughter, along with her slave, who served her. He told the knight how very much he cared about his daughter, promising the knight that upon his return he would be greatly rewarded. After the king departed, this soldier fell in love with the slave, giving in to her in everything, and he despised the daughter of the king. He wished that the princess be subject to the slave. What does this knight deserve, when the king returns?

This king is Jesus Christ, Son of the Virgin Mary, King of Kings. The beloved daughter is the soul which is made precisely like him, more so even than a portrait, because it is created in the image of God. God says when he wishes to create man: "Let us make man to our image and likeness," (Gen 1:26). This is not said nor understood with regards to the body, because God is incorporeal, but with regards to the soul, which by nature is spiritual, noble, generous and beautiful. If you could only see one soul in its beauty, in so far as it is the image of God, you would not wish to eat nor drink. The beauty of the sun or moon is nothing compared to it. And it is loved by Christ, for he wishes to give his heavenly kingdom to it. And it seems that he loved it more than himself. For which reason he wished to be born and live in this world for 33 years, and finally suffer and die, out of complete love of his daughter. And he can say, "Give me the persons [literally, animas, souls], and the rest take for yourself," (Gen 14:21). The king wished to go overseas to visit the holy places.

This world is like the sea because of its waves and dangers, and little fish are eaten by big fish. And on the day of the ascension from this world he departed, and committed his daughter to a knight, because he committed your soul to you, and mine to me, and with a slave, namely the flesh, that it would serve the soul. And now we are committing adultery with the slave. We give in to the flesh, despising the soul, and we wish that the soul would serve it. Why are you all dressed up? Is it not because of love of the flesh. Why have you prepared gourmet food? Is it not out of love of the slave? And you don't care about the daughter of the king. She is dying of hunger, and is naked and dirty. We often wash and bathe the flesh. And there is no mention of the daughter of the king, nor do we care about her. Men strive for land, and travel the sea over for the slave. And for the soul, the daughter of the king, we cannot even rest on Sundays. You will be condemned just as the knight. Think what the king will do to you when he comes, soon in the general judgment, or what will you say in your particular judgment. See, then how it is a sin to wish to please the flesh more than the soul.

Behold, I give you some advice. Every day you, like the slave, who twice a day is ordered to bring meals, namely lunch and dinner, should care about the daughter of the king. You should do the same for the soul, praying morning and evening, and before meals, signing yourself and saying the Our Father and Hail Mary, devoutly thinking about Christ in glory, who is adored by the angels and watches over you. And finally by thinking how you will see the Virgin Mary at the right hand of her Son, you say, "Hail Mary full of grace, the Lord is with you, blessed, etc." In the evening, too, you should never forget that dinner or supper. On Sunday you prepare a larger dinner by hearing a full Mass, and that you go to confession which is like washing your hands. You should adore Christ, true God and man in the host. Once a year you should dress up in new clothes. This happens in confession where you take off your old clothes, and put on the new, at Easter, completing the great feast by receiving Holy Communion. And this way you are able to give a good account of his daughter at the judgment of Christ the King, who honors you in paradise. About those who do the opposite, caring more about the body than the soul, David says in Ps 72, "Because I had a zeal on occasion of the wicked, seeing the prosperity of sinners. For there is no regard to their death, nor is there strength in their stripes. They are not in the labor of men," namely through penance, "neither shall they be scourged like other men," (vv. 3-5), but with demons.

DOMESTIC PEACE

Second is domestic peace, at home, when husband and wife and family stand in good peace and concord without conflict. Such peace is called domestic, just as the first is called personal. For achieving this peace and keeping it, six rules [doctrinae] are necessary: two are for the husband toward the wife, and two for the wife toward the husband, and two of both the husband and wife toward the family at home.

First, it must be known, the husband ought to preserve his love toward his wife. The husband ought to love his wife, not hate her for some fault, from which she is a fine woman. There are some wretches [miseri] who love their wives only as long as the wedding bread lasts. When they are satisfied by it they despise them, and that is how war

breaks out at home. Blessed is the man who always keeps the same love which he showed his wife on the first day or week [of their marriage.]

Second, the husband ought to provide for his wife. He should not desert her, but provide for her, but not with vanities, because if she be vain, the husband ought to say to her, "Woman, I am damned with you," etc., because vain wives not only doom themselves but also their husbands who give in to them. A husband should not leave his wife in order to become a hermit or a religious once the marriage has been consummated by sexual relations, unless with permission of his wife, and then there also ought to be permission of the bishop, and that the wife be such that there would not be a suspicion of sinning etc. Therefore scripture says, "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ also loved the church, and delivered himself up for it: That he might sanctify it, cleansing it by the laver of water in the word of life: That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy, and without blemish. So also ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loves his wife, loves himself." See this beautiful text in Ephesians 5:25-28.

The wife ought to have two [attitudes] toward her husband, namely reverence and diligence. First reverence, that she is willing that the husband be lord, otherwise if in opposition, a war shall break out in the home. For nature, scripture, and both divine and human law dictate that the man be the lord of the home. It is against nature, divine and human law, that the woman be the lord of the man. It is told of the beautiful and noble Virgin Mary, etc. with how much reverence and honor she spoke to her spouse, Joseph, a poor and elderly man. So scripture says, "Let women be subject to their husbands, as to the Lord. Because the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church," (Eph 5:22-23). Note, "as to the Lord," not "opposed to the Lord," because it can be asked of the body of the wife that the woman ought not to consent [to sinning], moreover she should even permit herself to be killed, because she would be a martyr before she would consent.

Also she ought to be diligent, that she conserve that what the husband has earned with great labors and dangers, lest the home be like a leaky sack. She should keep the home and herself clean, because then the husband would love such a wife, and so there is peace at home. Of this diligence Ecclesiastes 26: "The grace of a diligent woman shall delight her husband, and shall fat his bones." (Sir 26:16), that is she makes him fat all over.

Third, the husband and wife ought to have two [requirements.] toward the family. First about the education of the children. There are many who say it is enough that he gives the children food and drink, but they do not care to educate them or to instruct them, etc. Children ought to be nourished. Because just as the tender tree is leaned, etc. so sons when they are poor. This especially belongs to the mother, because when the children ask for bread in the morning, a good mother should say, "Now, son say the Hail Mary, you know that she is our queen in heaven," and "Now, let us genuflect," etc. You say the Hail Mary and see that he signs himself with the sign of the cross, and the children ought to tell their parents that they didn't lie, didn't steal, weren't contentious, that they confessed

when they are five or six years old, and that they receive Holy Communion when they are twelve years old. The parents ought to lead them to church to hear Mass etc. and so the scripture says, "And you, fathers, provoke not your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and correction of the Lord." (Eph 6:4). Guilty is the gardener if the vines are twisted, because when still small they can be straightened. So you parents are like gardeners. You have planted vines in the vineyard of Christ, i.e. the church.

With respect to servants and captive slaves [servos et captivos], they should induce them to be baptized or that they be obliged to attend Mass, to be given an opportunity of hearing Mass and receiving communion, then such a home is blessed. To do the opposite of the aforesaid is the greatest sin. See what scripture says, "But if any man have not care of his own, and especially of those of his house, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel," (1 Tim 5:8). Domestic peace consists in this, what a husband should have toward his wife, etc.

A brief epilogue. Such a home has peace and the blessing of God, therefore scripture says, "O Israel," i.e. a man seeing God, "if you had walked in the way of God," namely in these ways which I have said, "you had surely dwelt in peace for ever." (Bar 3:13).

UNIVERSAL PEACE

The first peace is personal. The second domestic. The third is universal, when a community, village or city lives in peace, then it is universal peace. And this is a peace that is first in the heart, second on the lips, third in deed. In the heart because it does not have envy, anger, nor ill will toward each other, It is more sympathetic to those who hold office or rule, who ought not to be envied, because they have to give a reason for all those entrusted to them, just as everyone is sorry for a ship in trouble at sea and doesn't envy it. So whoever has rule of people, is on a stormy sea in danger of sinking into hell, so much so that no prudent man ought to yearn to rule. Therefore he is rather to be sympathized with than to be envied.

Second, this peace is on the lips, when we speak to, and greet each other. Because just as through the smoke of a chimney is revealed the fire in the house, so through greetings the fire of peace and love existing in the heart [is revealed], because the heart cannot be seen by anyone. No one should say [dicat] "If he speaks to me, I'll speak to him," etc. It is told how the Virgin Mary was the first to speak to the ones crucified with her Son.

Third it consists in deed. There should be no quarrels and lawsuits. There are some who even in paradise would start arguments [inveniret quaestiones], etc. Therefore the Apostle, Paul, says: "Already indeed there is plainly a fault among you, that you have lawsuits one with another. Why do you not rather endure wrong? Why do you not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded? But you do wrong and defraud, and that to your brethren," (1 Cor 6:7-8). For this reason the Apostle commands, "If it be possible, as much as is in you, have peace with all men." (Rom 12:18).