

C246 De beato Petro apostolo Sermo

St. Vincent Ferrer O.P. -- Sermon on the Feast of SS. Peter & Paul (Mt 16:17)

"Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona," (Mt 16:17)

The feast and solemnity today is of the two greater apostles, princes of the others, who were martyred for Christ on the same day and in the same city, Rome, under the same emperor, Nero. And so great is the dignity of each of them that the church celebrates the feast in honor of St. Peter today, and tomorrow in honor of St. Paul, because today is not sufficient to preach about both. But that the present sermon be with praise and reverence, etc., let the Virgin Mary be saluted.

And the theme is taken up again. The text for the theme and the basis of our sermon requires some literal explanation. For which it must be known that Peter, before he was the disciple of Christ, the apostle and universal Pope, was called Simon, but after he was a disciple of Christ, and an apostle, Christ constituted him as Pope and his universal vicar and gave him the name Peter. Just as happens even now, when the Pope is elected, his name is changed, as if he is changed into another person, and new creature, so Christ did, Matt 3, and he imposed upon Simon the name Peter. Peter's father was called John and sometimes in a gross manner he is called Joanna, and sometimes diminutively Joannet, sometimes he is commonly called Jona. Just as we commonly make in our language about some proper name, so the Jews were calling the father of Peter. And so also Christ named him. Sometimes as commonly he is called Joannes, as there, "Simon of John," i.e. Simon of John. Sometimes in an expanded way, "Thou art Simon the son of Jona," Jn 1:42. Sometimes in a shortened way, as where, "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona," Mt 16:17, son of Jona [Joanna]. that is Joannet. The theme is clear then, according to the literal exposition, and I am in the matter to be preached in the theme. Peter is called with two names and two names are used, namely Simon, and Bar-Jona, and each name has two interpretations, in which four virtues are shown in Peter, because of which he is blessed in heaven, namely

Prompt obedience
Harsh penitence
Right intention
And hard passion.

PROMPT OBEDIENCE

As for the first virtue through which St. Peter is blessed, it is said to be prompt obedience, which is noted here when he is called Simon, which means "obedient." When a person hears and obeys words and commandments of God, and without any excuse fulfills the will of God, he is like a servant faithful to the will of his lord, he is obedient, and merits to be rewarded, that is to be released at the end of his service. So whoever promptly and obeys observes the words and commandments of God in this world, when he finishes his service, namely in death, justly shall have a reward and beatitude for his salary. So Luke 11: "Blessed are they who hear the word of God, and keep it," (Lk 11:28) This obedience Peter had, as is clear from Mt 4 : "And Jesus walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea (for they were fishermen). And he said to them: Come after

me, and I will make you to be fishers of men. And they immediately leaving their nets, followed him," (Mt 4:18-20).

Practically. St. Peter before he was a disciple of Christ was a poor fisherman, because of the fact that he and his brother St. Andrew had only one boat and one net, and so they lived from their labors. So while they were fishing one day, adrift on the lake, the sea of Galilee, then Christ himself along the shore of the lake saw Peter and Andrew. He said to them, "O my good men, how are you doing?" They responded, "Lord, we want to catch some fish." Christ knowing that they would do better elsewhere than here, said to them, "Come after me, and I will make you to be fishers of men," (Mt 4:19). "I shall teach you to catch kings, princes, dukes, counts, and generations of many peoples." In these words, "Come after me," etc., there are two [secrets].

The first is this. The Christian church is like a ship of three decks [cooperturatum]. The first deck, deep or lowest is of members of religious orders humbling themselves. And just as the lower deck is hidden, so the religious ought to be hidden in the cloister and the cell, not going about on the roads or doing secular business on the streets. The second deck signifies the state of the priests, who ought to minister the sacraments of the church, ordinarily in the middle deck is kept the good merchandise of great value. So in the hand of priests and in their power stand the treasures of paradise, namely the sacraments, because of which we have eternal life. The third deck, is the status of the laity, who go here and there through the world like merchants, and like those on the ship who go through the decks doing the works of a sailor. Of this Solomon says, "She is like the merchant's ship," of a peddler, "she brings her bread from afar," (Prov 31:14).

The second secret is when he said, "I will make you to be fishers of men," (Mt 4:19), who are the preachers. Preaching is like a net, because just as with a net all is collected and it is drawn by one cord, so evangelical preaching uses several cords, namely, authorities, reasons, and parables, and all are collected. If preaching is well organized, and they draw one cord, namely the theme, which is the basis of a sermon, God sends those preachers. Jer 16: "Therefore behold the days come,...I will send many fishers, says the Lord, and they shall fish them," (vv. 14, 16). He sends many fisherman because the apostles, martyrs, confessors and us, to whom he says, "Let down your nets for a catch," (Lk 5:4). He does not say, "fold them," he says this against those who have great knowledge but keep it folded, and are unwilling to fling it out for preaching, for catching fish. See why he says, "Come after me," etc., as if to say, "Leave the little boat, with which you now catch fish, and put yourselves in the great ship of the church, with three decks. "Leave the nets and you shall have gospel teaching [doctrinam evangelicam]; leave that sea and I shall make you fishers of men, of kings, knights and of others." By divine power Peter understood all this, when Christ said in his own voice, "Come after me," etc. He knew him to be the true Messiah, etc. Therefore so that St. Peter would have evangelical teaching instead of nets, and so he could fish for men throughout the world on the ship of the church, he obeyed promptly. For the gospel says, "Leaving their nets," and boat, "Peter and Andrew unhesitatingly [incontinenti] followed him," (Mk 1:18). St. Peter, before Christ on his knees said in his heart, "Not with a net, nor a boat, you have placed in my heart the delight of fishing in the sea of this world with the incorruptible evangelical teaching of the church," and immediately he went off with Christ.

See the prompt obedience of Peter. It is said here against the defect of this world. For all are called by Christ, namely Christians, Jews, Muslims, and we refuse to go. He calls us by enlightening our hearts, giving recognition of sins, and immediately we ought to follow him, but it happens to us as it did to Samuel, who was called by God and he went to Eli. Note the story 1 Kg 3:4-5. Not so Job did, he said, "You shall call me, and I will answer you," (Job 14:15). Against such Christ said, "I called, and you refused: I stretched out my hand, and there was none that regarded," (Prov 1:24).

Morally. When he said, "I will make you to be fishers of men," (Mt 4:19). Note this religious and others show have the office of preaching, because all are fishermen, and the net is evangelical preaching. Therefore now cast out the net, and when someone hearing the preaching proposes to abandon sins, and vices, and has an intention of returning to God, then the preacher can say, "I have caught a fish." When a nobleman or knight [miles] because of preaching turns away from pomp, hatred or rancor against his enemy, we have caught a dolphin [delphinum]. O such fish and fishermen, how much they please God! Same of a noble lady, who abandons vanities, ornaments and the like and confesses, and proposes to live well, then he can say that we have caught a tuna [tonica]. When preaching converts a farmer or simple man, a flounder [fundulus] is caught. Same for a poor woman, an eel [sarpina?]. And on the day of judgment Christ will say to the preachers, "Come," now, "and dine," (Jn 21:12). And when they say What shall we lunch on? then he shall reply, "Bring here the fish which you have ... caught," (Jn 21:10). O what will become of that preacher who says, "Lord I have only caught seaweed and flotsam, namely money, praise, gifts, acquaintances and fame [scil. pecunias, raupas, comeras, familiaritates et famam]. Therefore for love of God we labor to catch souls. For in the judgment every one comes with the souls which he converted saying, "See the two fish which I have landed." O how many fish and how many souls St. Peter brought with him, who in his first preaching converted three thousand souls and men, See Acts 2 and 4.

HARSH PENANCE

As for the second virtue for which St. Peter is blessed in paradise is harsh penance [aspera poenitentia], which is shown when he is called Simon, which is understood in a second sense as imposing sadness [ponens tristitiam], namely of penance, about which the Apostle says, "For the sorrow that is according to God works penance, steadfast unto salvation," (2 Cor 7:10). Note "that is according to God" i.e. when it displeases man about offenses made to God, such blessedness is merited, because he did true penance. Whence Mat 5:5, "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted," namely in heavenly beatitude. Look now at the penance of St. Peter. How did he do penance? In eating, in drinking, in dressing. In eating you know that once when he was asked what was his lifestyle, he replied, "My daily diet is bread with olives and rarely with vegetables, only on great feast days." See his life, although he was Pope. But it is asked, How did it happen that so many capons, hens, pheasants, salted fish [salsianae] are now on the table of prelates? They call it bountiful [truffative], that those olives of St. Peter were pregnant and gave birth to the capons and the rest.

The same was asked about clothing, and he replied, "My clothing is a tunic which you see, with a cape, both in the winter as well as the summer." See the first clothing of the first vicar of Christ. But it is asked, how did it evolve that now the prelate wears so many sumptuous clothes etc, so many linings. It is said that the cape of Peter gave birth to them, etc.

So his life was such that from his eyes flowed a fountain of tears, remembering his denial, and because of this as long as he lived he cried, and he lived after the ascension of Christ for 37 years, as in the *Liber de viris illustribus*. St. Jerome says that he cried so much that he had a face scorched from the heat of the tears.

Note, penance for denial. He sinned by mouth denying Christ, therefore he did penance by mouth, eating only bread and olives, as if he was saying because you have sinned, you shall then fast. Second he denied Christ, by warming his body, as John says (Cf Jn 18:18), so he did penance in his body, wearing only one tunic with a cape. Third just as his face was not ashamed to deny Christ, so he wept. These are the fruits of worthy penance. Luke 3, "Bring forth...fruits worthy of penance,"(Lk 3:8), for that through which one sins, by this is penance done.

Morally. St. Peter for his triple denial of Christ, because out of fear he denied Christ, did penance nevertheless for all his 37 years. What shall it be for those deniers, who not only three times, but a thousand times a day deny Christ for the least thing, or for a minor incident, swearing great oaths, blaspheming Christ? O accursed denier, what shall happen to your soul? If St. Peter for a threefold denial did such etc. what should you do, who swear not out of fear of death, but out of a bad habit? Again, St. Peter said only "I do not know him." Think what will happen to your soul! For the love of God, steps should be taken so that these detestable oaths may cease.

I will give you three remedies. First, you women who have little children should instruct them to not swear. Second, that every swearer should set for himself this rule, namely that he should fine himself a certain amount for every time he swears, and give it to the poor on Sundays and so he would be cured. The third manner of correcting [swearing] pertains to the civic leaders, who by statute give an order that whoever swears using God's name should be punished in a certain way, etc. and to spare no one in this matter, which touches on the honor of Christ. But because the civic leaders do not correct, God is saddened by saying. "They that rule over them treat them unjustly, says the Lord, and my name is continually blasphemed all the day long. Therefore my people shall know my name in that day: for I myself who spoke, behold I am here," namely by punishing. (Isa 52:5-6). See the second virtue in this the meaning of the name "Simon," which is, imposing sadness.

RIGHT INTENTION

As for the third virtue by which St. Peter is called blessed, is right intention, namely in all things which he was doing by preaching, celebrating and exercising other works of virtue, always looking to the honor of God, which is noted in this that he is called Bar-Jona, which means "son of simplicity," and not "of duplicity." When indeed someone looks to the world, for honors, and not to God, it is duplicity. This happens to them like a rooster which with one eye looks to the sky, and with the other grain. St. Peter in all things had a right intention directed to God. Whence in the Psalm, "Not to us, O Lord, not to us; but to your name give glory," (Ps 113:9). Behold, simplicity. And these merit beatitude. Whence in Mat 5, "Blessed are the clean of heart: for they shall see God," (v. 8), here through contemplation, and in the next age through eternal possession. St. Peter does indeed have this virtue, because although he was Pope, and the vicar of Christ, he had such holiness that he could heal all the sick, and when his

shadow touched the sick, they would be cured. It is told how when they knew that he was about to pass through another village, they would place the sick so that his shadow would touch them and they would be healed. (Cf Acts 5:15). But even with all this he kept such a simplicity, that he had no hypocrisy or vain glory or presumption. He went about simply. He ruled and corrected himself. It is clear that he was the son of simplicity. And he was able to say, "I know my God that you prove hearts, and love simplicity, wherefore I also in the simplicity of my heart, have joyfully offered all these things," (1 Chr 29:9). "You prove the heart of a creature if he keeps a good and right intention, and if he is simple, you love him, and so in the simplicity of my heart I loved you and I have served you with a true heart."

Morally. This must be known that God first looks to the intention in our works. For if one would do all kind of good in the world, and would not have a good intention, it would merit you nothing. In other words, for example, it is a great work of merit to enter religious life, just as St. Thomas says II-II, q. 89, a. 3, ad 3m, that the vow of religion if made with a right intention since it is perpetual, is greater than a vow to travel on pilgrimage to the Holy Land, which is temporal, so Alexander III says and it is found in *Extravagantes, De voto et voti red. c. scripturae*. And later Thomas adds, that it can reasonably be said that one obtains the remission of all sins by the entry into religious life, which is more useful than a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, with respect to promotion in good. This is greater than absolution from penalty. This Thomas says in the same place and in beautiful words of this same matter.

But this work, namely the entry into religion, is perverted and it is lost when the intention is perverse and temporary, as for example because you hope that your son will become abbot, or a master in theology, or a bishop, and so you induce him to enter religious life. Unless you hoped this, he never would have entered religion, because such an intention is not for God, but for the world. and merit is lost. Or if he enters so that he might live in peace, not for observing religion, this intention is perverse. For it is better for a religious to have been a thief, than to be a religious not observing what he ought. Also, to preach the word of God is worthy of great merit, because it is a great work, if the intention is right, but when someone preaches because of vainglory or for fame, or for money, having the intention for worldly things, all is lost and he is damned.

St. Thomas asks in Quodlibet 5, q. 12, a. 2. in body, "Whether through penance one can recover the halo [laureolam] which has been promised to one preaching worthily, if he has lost it through vainglory? And he says that it is not, because it was not gained according to the judgment of the Lord, "Amen I say to you, they have received their reward," (Mt 6:2). He can nevertheless acquire the grace of God if he amends, or through good preaching he can gain anew another halo, but the one lost he can never recover.

The same in a just war, those who go forth do a great work if they have a right intention. Blessed are they who die for justice or the defense of the republic, they are glorious among the martyrs, although the church does not celebrate a feast day. But if they do it because of vanity, as many saying, "Out of love of my lord..." etc. O fool, in such a case it is necessary to set forth first love and divine respect and true justice, saying, "Let us do this out of love and zeal for justice." Therefore we shall either sing in the temples of our enemies through the victory which

we have, or with God in Paradise, from the fact that we have defended justice. But when you have a foolish intention, you lose the entire good work.

Similarly to forgive injuries, to spare the enemies, is a great work if it is done for God and the love of Christ, but when it happens not out of reverence for or love of God, but out of respect for persons, all merit is lost. Practically speaking, if the Pope or a king would ask you that you forgive, perhaps you would forgive, and yet for Christ you did not forgive. It is said how Christ in judgment showing his wounds will say, "Behold, what I have done for you. Let us see what you have done for me. If you have forgiven out of love of him, he shall give you Paradise. But if you have forgiven out of love of the Pope, or of the king, or of some others, he will say to you, "Go to them, so that they might give you paradise, you who had to satisfy them. If you forgave with a pure intention out of honor of Christ, then Christ receives you by hand saying, "Well done, good and faithful servant," (Mt 25:21). Be careful that in all things you direct the intention to God, "That in all things God may be honored through Jesus Christ: to whom is glory and empire for ever and ever. Amen," (1 Pet 4:11).

HARD SUFFERING

As to the fourth virtue, which is hard suffering [dura passio], when he is called Bar-Jona, which according to a second interpretation means "Son of a dove," Behold here his martyrdom. It is said when the priests of the old testament offered a dove to God, he first stripped its feathers [deplumabant]. Then broke its wings, then broke its neck and bent its head down, and such a sacrifice was very much acceptable to God, as is said in Leviticus, "It is a holocaust and oblation of most sweet savor to the Lord," (Lev 1:17).

That St. Peter was the son of a dove is clear in his martyrdom because of the patience which he had, and through eternal beatitude, "If also you suffer any thing for justice' sake, blessed are you," (1 Pet 3:14). It is told how St. Peter, after he had preached through many cities and towns and converted many gentiles in Antioch and elsewhere, came to Rome, and he there preaching against the mandate of the emperor Nero, who had ordered him not to preach the faith of Christ, was arrested. Christians wishing to free him were saying to him, "O Father, we shall free you, flee from all this." Finally, yielding he fled from there, and when leaving the city, Christ appeared to him with his cross on his shoulders. When Peter saw him he said, "Lord, where are you going?" As if he were saying, "I am leaving the city and you are entering." Christ replied, "I am going to Rome to be crucified again." He was saying, "Once I was crucified in Jerusalem. Now I go again to be crucified." Christ was saying that after he had been crucified in Jerusalem in his own person, now again in place of Peter [in persona Petri] he had to be crucified in Rome. This Peter understood, and immediately he returned to the city, and Christ to heaven. And Peter told his Christian friends of the city how Christ had appeared etc. It is clear how he was acceptable and gracious to God.

He was returned to the custody of the emperor. Officials came and he was sentenced to be crucified on the cross which he had adored, saying to the officials, "Please, I beg of you, that you do not crucify me head up, as Christ my master, but point my head down. The officials said, "Greater torment will be yours. We will accommodate you in this. When he was on the cross he never ceased to preach to those standing around him. He shows us here the lesson that we should never cease preaching, not because of cold nor heat, nor fatigue, but work for the

conversion of souls. And to him, here standing, Christ sent an angel with crowns of violets [violarum] and Christ appeared to him holding a book in his hands, which St. Peter read, and after which he said, "Lord Jesus Christ, I have give thanks to you, who have borne me to the hoped for end, Lord I commend to you these Christians, children generated in the womb of your spouse, namely in the church through baptism." And so he handed over his spirit to God, whom the angels of God bore to glory.

Morally. This cross of Peter was not like the cross of Christ, but I find that you place your hope in the cross of St. Peter, which can save none, not even St. Peter, unless by the power of Christ. So, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ," (Gal 6:14). which is stronger.

Some in fact, although not in mind, hold hope in the sign of the devil which is a circle. For just as good religious in the beginning of the hours [of the divine office] call upon God with the sign of the cross saying, "O God, come to my assistance;" (Ps 69:2), they make a circle, because, "The wicked walk round about," (Ps 11:9). Tell the whole defective practice of those who do not sign themselves correctly at the entrance of the church, or at table, or a woman putting a child to bed. Same for the priests, although speaking well, they make a circle over the water, the bread, and what is worst over the Body of Christ. Show here how they sign themselves. Against this sign no danger can prevail. You should instruct your own. About this sign of the cross, read the prophecy in Cant 8, "Under the apple tree I raised thee up,... Put me as a seal upon thy heart, as a seal upon thy arm," (Song 8:5,6).