

C277 De sancta Anna matre beatæ virginis Mariæ. Sermo

St. Vincent Ferrer, O.P. – Sermon on St. Ann (Rom. 6:22)

"You have your fruit unto sanctification," (Rom. 6:22). This text is found originally in Romans 6, and is read in the epistle of the current solemnity. Today's feast and solemnity is of that blessed and holy mother of the Virgin Mary, Saint Ann. And just as the business of the mass is about her, so shall our sermon be. And, if it pleases God about her life we shall have many good teachings for the correction of sins and the instruction of our souls, and good information. But first let us "Hail" the Virgin Mary.

I present the proposed text of St. Ann saying, "You, blessed Ann, have your fruit, the Virgin Mary, in your sanctification." For the declaration of which it must be known that the question is between several persons, why holy mother the Church and the Christian people have not made a feast for the father of the Virgin Mary, holy and just, called Joachim, just as for her mother St. Ann. I reply that although Joachim was holy and a blessed friend of God nevertheless St. Ann was of a greater sanctity. Reason, because she had a greater relationship [participationem] with the Virgin Mary, her daughter. For a father participates somewhat with his children, but a mother who bears them for nine months, and after giving birth, nurses, feeds, sleeps with them and kisses them. Because therefore St. Ann had a greater relationship with the Virgin Mary her daughter, the fount of all holiness, who was holy already existing in the womb of her mother, think therefore how much holiness remained in St. Ann who bore her and nourished her, by giving her what she had, the Virgin Mary gave holiness to her mother, and so she was holier, more perfect, and more spiritual than her husband Joachim.

Note, the similarity to that of the rose, which is picked by one, and given to another, and that one carries it and holds it in a closed hand. In whom therefore does more of the fragrance of that rose or apple remain, in the one giving or the one receiving? Certainly it is in the one receiving. So the Rose of Paradise and the Apple of Virtues, the Virgin Mary, was given by Joachim to St. Ann through generation, and St. Ann received, bore and nurtured, and nursed her for three years, more of the odor of sanctity therefore remained in her.

This is the reason why there is a feast of St. Ann, and not of Joachim. Thus the scripture text, the authority, which deals well with the proposition. "Rejoice, you just, in the Lord," you Christians, "and give praise to the remembrance of his holiness," of the holiness of St. Ann, (Ps 96:12). This reason the theme touches saying, "You have your fruit unto sanctification," (Rom. 6:22), greater than her father Joachim. The theme text is clear.

I find that St. Ann had her fruit, the Virgin Mary, mother of the Lord Jesus Christ :
 By desiring at length (Desiderando longe)
 By hoping firmly (Sperando certe)
 By conserving worthily. (Conservando digne.)

DESIRING AT LENGTH

First, I say, that St. Ann had her fruit, the Virgin Mary, by desiring for a long time. St. Jerome says, that St. Joachim a noble man from the town of Bethlehem got married and for 20 years was without the fruit of marriage, not having offspring. The reason was Ann who was sterile and barren. She was so cold that her metabolism prevented conception. On this account she was completely saddened. Reason, because marriage is ordered to procreation of children, because everything else was not worth a penny. Therefore seeing that by her natural power she was not able to have a child, she grasped at the four ways, that she might have one by the power of God.

First, through devout prayers,

Second, through giving alms,

Third, by many fasts,

Fourth, by a vow and promise.

DEVOUT PRAYERS

For the first she went often to the temple to pray, that God might give them the fruit of marriage, because that is the end, -- so trees are planted in the garden, that they might bear fruit -- and they said, "Lord you have placed us in the garden of marriage, etc." And weeping they begged for a child. So on one occasion when St. Ann saw a sparrow's nest in the garden, St. Ann, in tears, said to God, "O Lord, you have given to this sparrow so many chicks, for which with great labor she provides. Lord give me a child." Behold the first manner of turning to God, by praying, because no one else can give a son or a daughter, for creation is required for that. For God forms the body in the womb of the mother, like you form a statue of earth or clay, and then he creates the soul out of nothing. Knowing this Job said, "Your hands have made me, and fashioned me" -- neither father nor mother -- "wholly round about, and do you thus cast me down headlong on a sudden? Remember, I beseech you, that you have made me as the clay, and you will bring me into dust again. Have you not milked me as milk, and curdled me like cheese?" (Job 10:8-10).

Now you have to know that it is the sin of many who when they cannot have a child of their marriage turn to diviners and fortune tellers etc. And so repent and confess, and seek from God, because if the fruit of marriage be useful to your soul, infallibly he shall give it to you. The authority of Christ on this: "Amen, amen I say to you: if you ask the Father any thing in my name, he will give it you," (Jn 16:23). Note: "In my name," which is Jesus, that is, savior. It is asked in the name of the savior when a man asks something useful for salvation, and not for damnation.

GIVING ALMS

Second, Joachim and Ann begged God for a child through alms, because the angel said to Tobias, "Prayer is good with fasting and alms more than to lay up treasures of gold," (Tob 12:8). And because they were rich, not from usurious interest, but from their possessions. And Jerome says, that he divided his goods into three parts. The first he gave to God. The second to pilgrims, orphans and the poor. The third they kept for themselves and the family's house. Note how he divided his grain: The first part he sent to the temple, the second was set out for the poor, the third for themselves. The same for

the wine, the oil and the rest. In this manner prayer is aided by alms, and vice versa. Therefore scripture says, "Give alms out of your substance, and turn not away your face from any poor person: for so it shall come to pass that the face of the Lord shall not be turned from you," (Tob 4:7).

Morally, we find this teaching, that if you are not able to give so much alms as you are bound, nor does the heart suffice, you should pay at least a tenth and first-fruits. There are some who say, "O shall I give my goods to wicked sensual (concupinariis) clergymen? Certainly not!" It is said that it is given to God, and not to them. If however God has bad clergy, he shall castigate them, and by this you ought not to hold back from them their right. For if a king has bad soldiers, you ought not for this reason withhold from him what is due, because someone else would receive the commission for him. So too for God, because, "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof: the world, and all they that dwell therein," (Ps 23:1). And he grants it to us for an annual account, and in a sign of his dominion he keeps for himself a tenth, but he does not eat it, but gives it to his servants. And when it is paid well, he keeps and conserves it, otherwise all is lost. When you believe you have grain or wine does not God say, "Because you paid me badly, I shall devastate all. And so come storms, hail etc." Therefore Malachi said: "For you afflict me. And you have said: Wherein do we afflict you? in tithes and in first fruits. And you are cursed with want, and you afflict me, even the whole nation of you," (Mal 3:8-9). This is the remedy. "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in my house, and try me in this, says the Lord: if I open not unto you the flood-gates of heaven, and pour you out a blessing even to abundance. And I will rebuke for your sakes the devourer," (Mal 3:10-11). Note, "Bring". He does not say that it will be dumped into the vineyards and fields, that the beasts, and the pigs, etc. can eat.

Also if you cannot give as much alms as St. Ann, at least return your thefts, extorted interest, loot, damages and acres. And so James says, "I made good all the damage: whatsoever was lost by theft, you did exact it of me," (Gen 31:39).

FASTING

Third they petitioned with fasting, although they were noble and delicate, yet they kept all fasts and precepts and even more, saying, "That from our flesh may proceed the fruit of marriage, let us make the fruit of fastings. And each could say, "I humbled my soul with fasting; and my prayer shall be turned into my bosom," (Ps 34:13).

Morally, you have here the teaching that you should keep the fasts of the church. To this especially are bound those who can have one good meal. Others, laborers, excuse themselves from the fast of the church, who nevertheless are not excused if they do not hear mass fasting. Also they do not drink in the taverns in the place where they have a home. So the Apostle, "What, have you not houses to eat and to drink in?" against those who drink in taverns, "Or despise ye the church of God," against those who do not come to mass fasting. (1Cor 11:22).

VOWS AND PROMISES

Fourth they sought a child from God by promises, because together Joachim and Ann made a vow that if God would give them the fruit of marriage, they would serve God in

the temple. Just as now if you would promise to become a religious or a nun. But many are damned by promises and vows, making vows and not caring to fulfill them. It is a grave sin to break vows in any way, greater than homicide, because it is unfaithfulness. Therefore the wise man said, Eccles. 5: "If you have vowed any thing to God, defer not to pay it: for an unfaithful and foolish promise displeases him: but whatsoever you have vowed, pay it. And it is much better not to vow, than after a vow not to perform the things promised," (Eccl 5:3-4). When they are young, they make a vow to [on pilgrimage] to St. James (Santiago de Compostella), and the years go by, year after year, and they don't bother to fulfill it, and when they are old they ask for a dispensation from the vow. When there a definite time is fixed, within which it ought to be fulfilled. If however there is not fixed a determined time, it must be understood that they are to fulfill it immediately. And because there are many who do not care about God, therefore they are damned. And so beware of vows. It is clear therefore how the fruit of St. Ann was a sanctification long desired.

HOPING FIRMLY

Second, I say that St. Ann had her fruit, the Virgin Mary, by hoping firmly (*sperando certe*), when it was certified by the angel, whom God sent to her. For which note here the story how Joachim and Ann came from Nazareth to Jerusalem to the temple, to offer according to their custom. When Joachim who was a noble baron wished to make an offering, a priest looked at him saying, "And who are you?" He replied, "Father I am Joachim, your servant, who has come to offer sacrifice." And the priest said, "I will certainly not accept your offering, because you are cursed by God, because you do not have a child. It is a sign that there is some hidden sin in you." And Joachim said to him, "Father, I do not know of any great sin in me, although I am not able to be excused of sin, because I do not have a child, and this displeases me very much." And the priest said to him, "Get out of the temple." And Joachim replied, "Father, do not shame me so much." And the priest said, "Surely, until you get out I will make no offering or sacrifice." Then Joachim, with great shame, left the temple. If a priest wished to act in such a way now, namely expel one of the nobles from church, immediately his knight would say, "By my body this one will die, etc. I shall find him." But Joachim patently withdrew and he did not return home out of shame because of his neighbors, but he went to his shepherds in the forest, and there, weeping, prayed saying, "O Lord, what is my sin, because I am so accursed." His wife Ann, however, who had been in the temple, when she heard that the priest so contended with her husband, and spurned him, lest she harm the priest left the temple and went home.

Here women have a model, how they should console their husbands who are upset by business, and when they come home, the wives ought to console them. But there are some who do not comfort them, rather sadden them even more. When however St. Ann went home and did not find her husband there, she put aside every creaturely desire from herself, and on bended knees prayed for her holy and just husband that God might keep him. Behold the holy wife.

While Joachim so wept praying in the wilderness, the archangel Gabriel appeared to him, and Joachim was afraid, because this is the condition of the spirit, for flesh cannot

stand the presence of a spirit. But the condition of a good spirit is to comfort immediately, saying to him, "Behold, your prayers are heard. Because of that patience which you had, God sent me to you, that I might announce to you that you, with your wife shall have a daughter, not a son, who shall be greater than all daughters, and shall be the mother of the Messiah king of heaven. And as a sign of this, go into Jerusalem, in the golden gate you will find Ann your wife, because I shall announce this also to her." And the angel withdrew, and appeared to Ann who was weeping at home, because she knew nothing about her husband. The angel spoke well saying that, "You shall be made sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy," (Jn 16:20).

Morally, according to what I said in the first part, Joachim and Ann persisted for twenty years, praying, giving alms, fasting and vowing, and with all this they did not have a child. And because he kept his patience in this shaming inflicted on him by a priest, immediately he had the promise of a child. It follows from this that before God, patience is better than prayers, alms, fastings or promises. Now think about it, for if you will to have patience in injuries or events, this virtue counts more with God for getting that which you need in this world, and salvation in the other, than anything else. Therefore throw out rancor, hatred, and ill will. And so sacred scripture says: "For patience is necessary for you; that, doing the will of God, you may receive the promise," (Heb 10:36). Behold how St. Ann had her "fruit unto sanctification" by hoping firmly.

CONSERVING WORTHILY

Third, I say, by conserving worthily (*conservando digne*), in three ways.

First in the womb, in which the body is formed, and the spirit is created by God, on the same day and hour the Virgin Mary was sanctified. Nine months she was in the womb of her holy and blessed mother, and her mother, St. Ann took care that she did not ride about here and there, as men do, and took care to refrain from dancing, because by this many women lose the treasure committed to them.

Second she cared after giving birth by nursing her. Thus did the holy women of old. But now immediately the wife says to her husband, "Do you have a wet nurse?" And she does this so that she is able to show off her breasts etc. They prefer not to give milk to their child, and give a bitch instead. They do evil, because just as the womb is the chamber of the child, so thus the breasts ought to be its pantry. But St. Ann herself wanted to nurse the Virgin Mary, because sons and daughters receive their good complexion (*bonam complectionem*) from the mother, but they lose it often from bad milk. Note here the example of that nobleman in Lombardy, because he had a wet nurse for his son, who having lost her milk, nursed the child with the milk from a pig, lest she lose her contract and salary. The son became and lived like a pig. See how the complexion is destroyed. The same for captives who nurse the children of their mistresses.

Third, she cared for her in the temple. After St. Ann had weaned the Virgin, she said to her husband, "Lord, do you not remember the vow?" He replied, "Indeed. And so we fulfill the vow." He did not say "Let us wait until she is ten years old or more." Or when

they are beautiful then they say, "We shall give for her another one, humpbacked or one-eyed." And immediately Joachim and Ann presented their daughter to God in the temple, where she remained for ten continuous years in the service of God. And so we can say, St. Ann, "You have your fruit unto sanctification," by conserving worthily.

Morally, here you have an example of staying in the temple of God on Sundays and feasts hearing mass and a sermon. He who wishes to keep the feast well, ought to do five things:

First, to cease from all temporal business, not to get a shave (*facere barbi tonsura*), nor do any other servile work. Reason, because on Sunday, Christ ceased from all business and labors by rising, and so he wished that Christians representing that resurrection and quiet ought to rest on Sundays. Same for the saints, because on that day they rested in eternal rest. Who however does not wish to rest, shall labor forever in hell.

Second, that you hear mass fasting. The reason is stated why taverns ought not to be open before mass on a feast day.

Third that you should be on time for mass. For you ought to be there at the beginning, for the "I confess," which is for your sake.

Fourth, you ought to remain at mass until the final blessing is given by the priest.

Fifth, that you ought not talk during mass, but today it is abused, because they no nothing else but talk of vain things at mass, etc. "Remember that you keep holy the Sabbath," (Ex 20:8).

But for those who keep these five, it can be said: "You have your fruit," good works, "unto sanctification," (Rom. 6:22).