

St. Vincent Ferrer, O.P. – On the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Sermon 2

"My memory is unto everlasting generations," (Sir 24:28). This is read in today's epistle. Today, you know, is a feast and a solemnity of the Nativity (birthday) of the Blessed Virgin Mary, born from the womb of her mother St. Anna. God willing, we hope to provide you with good information and moral instructions, but so that our words be for the honor of God, we now "Hail" the Virgin Mary.

This text is voiced in the person of the Virgin. "Memory," i.e., of my nativity. It must be known that in general there are two worlds. The first is that of spiritual and incorruptible creatures. The second of corporeal and corruptible creatures. The first is the empyreal heaven. About which Strabo said about Genesis 1, "As soon as the empyreal heaven was created, it was filled with angels." Second is the earth, which we commonly speak of as this world, because although the earth be permanent, corporeal creatures are corruptible. Therefore Solomon said, "One generation passes away, and another generation comes: but the earth stands for ever," (Eccl 1:4). I propose that the creation of these two worlds can be called "generation." Reason: because the generation of a particular creature is its beginning. The Philosopher (Aristotle) defining generation said, "Generation is the passing from non-being to being." Because these two worlds, heaven and earth, had a beginning through creation. Before the creation of heaven and earth there was no creature, but only the God, the Trinity, himself.

If some thoughtless person asks, "And then where did God live?" The answer is in the room of his eternity. Authority: "[The Lord,] High and the Eminent who inhabits eternity," (Isa 57:15). He created heaven and earth for us. And since then they have a principle of being, it can be called generation. Moses agrees saying, "These are the generations of the heaven and the earth, when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the heaven and the earth," (Gen 2:4). Therefore the Virgin Mary says, "My memory is unto ...generations," of the heaven and earth, prefigured, declared and demonstrated. The theme is clear. "My memory is unto everlasting generations," (Sir 24:28), from which the Virgin Mary takes us back to the creation of the worlds. We shall see what it says about this in scripture.

It says:

" In the beginning God created heaven, and earth.  
And the earth was void and empty,  
and darkness was upon the face of the deep;  
and the spirit of God moved over the waters.  
And God said: Be light made.  
And light was made.  
And God saw the light that it was good;  
and he divided the light from the darkness.  
And he called the light Day, and the darkness Night;  
and there was evening and morning one day," (Gen 1:1-5).

There are here ten clauses, containing the whole of today's feast, on account of which the Virgin Mary says, "My memory is unto everlasting generations," (Sir 24:28).

1. The first clause is when he says, "In the beginning God created heaven, and earth," together. So the simultaneousness of the creation of the heaven and the earth prefigures the mutual conjunction in the marriage of Joachim and Anna. Joachim is called "the heaven." Reason: because all his life was of heaven. He was noble, and was able to say, "But our conversation is in heaven," (Phil 3:20). Anna is called "earth" because she was fructified from the influence which she received from heaven. It can be explained from that verse in Psalm 84, "Lord, you have blessed your land," (v 2), because at first she was sterile. And it follows, "For the Lord will give goodness: and our earth," – St. Anna, called "our" for the utility which we have from her – "shall yield her fruit," (v 13) the Virgin Mary. It is clear therefore how the "memory" of the Virgin with respect to her parents' union is expressed and prefigured when it says, "In the beginning God created heaven and earth."

If someone says, brother, to the contrary, because it is not a good explanation that Joachim is called heaven and Anna, holier than Joachim, is called earth. And so the church celebrates her feast, but not his. The reason for this sanctity was, because Anna had a greater connection with the Virgin Mary, than her father. Fathers, because of their daily business, care less about their children, than mothers. Just as the stems of violets and roses smell more because they bear them for a longer time, than one who just touches them. So it is in the proposition, because the father in the generation of a child is like one who gives the bouquet of violets to the mother and goes away. But the mother bears the child in her womb and after the birth nurses, and holds in her arms, and kisses him, etc. Therefore Joachim does little.

Nevertheless Anna is called earth and Joachim heaven. Reason: because the woman, however much she be holy and virtuous, nevertheless is the subject, and the man ought to be the lord, and superior in the home. Because just as the earth is just a speck compared to the heavens from which it receives influence, because otherwise the earth would not bear fruit, so the wife with respect to her husband by whom she is ruled etc. Because therefore Joachim was the husband of St. Anna, so he would have superiority and primacy and the influence in the home, because wives should defer to the will of their husbands. "Let all wives, as well of the greater as of the lesser, give honor to their husbands," (Est 1:20). It was the law of Assuerus the emperor. On this account Joachim is called heaven and Anna earth.

Morally. Women are here instructed, lest it enter into their heads that they would have dominion, saying, "I shall be the lady of the house, for certainly then the hen shall crow, etc. Because nature and divine, church and imperial laws grant to the husband that he be lord. Therefore be warned...The man out to be the ruling heaven, and the wife ought to be the subjected earth. And so scripture says, "Let women be subject to their husbands, as [a servant] to the lord, because the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church... Therefore as the church is subject to Christ, so also let the wives be to their husbands in all things," – licit and honest – "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ also loved the church, and delivered himself up for it: That he might sanctify it," (Eph 5:22-26). See why the Virgin Mary says, "My memory, etc."

2. The second clause is when it says, "And the earth was void and empty," (Gen 1:2). Here the condition of St. Anne is shown, because although she was in the state of marriage with a noble husband, Joachim, she was sterile and infertile. She was of a cold metabolism, so that naturally she was not able to conceive. And so it is said she was "void," not by inanity and pompous vacuousness, but because she was not able to attain the goal of matrimony etc., which is to have children. Therefore she is called "void and empty," in her womb because of her infertility.

St. Jerome says that Joachim, a nobleman of the town of Nazareth, married Anna, a noble woman of the tribe of David from the town of Bethlehem, and twenty years passed without children, because "the earth was void and empty." But behold the manner which they held to. They undertook five remedies so that God would give them offspring. If you in your marriage wish for children, do the same.

1) First they gave generous alms of bread, wine, and fruits, and of all the rest they divided into three parts. The first part they gave to God and his servants in the temple. – Nowadays the situation has come to this that people don't want to give even a tenth – The second part they gave to travelers and the poor. The third they kept for themselves and for those of their household.

2) Second, they prayed devoutly and with tears said, "O Lord, since it has pleased you that we are married, grant us offspring, because everything else matters little, because you give the birds and animals offspring etc.

3) Third, they travelled often on pilgrimage from Nazareth to Jerusalem, frequently barefooted.

4) Fourth, they brought offerings and presented them in the temple.

5) Fifth, they took a vow to dedicate their child to the service of God, if God would give them one. And so for twenty years "the earth was void and empty." Scripture agrees saying, "I beheld the earth, and lo it was void," (Jer 4:23).

Morally. Here a note about marriage for women who desire children, and it is a good desire, that they do not turn to demons, diviners, soothsayers etc, because no one can give a child but God, because it requires creation, of the soul. If with diviners it happens that they have children, they have accomplished a wicked end. But turn to God with alms, prayers etc. Scripture says, "The soul that shall go aside after magicians, and soothsayers, and shall commit fornication with them, I will set my face against that soul, and destroy it out of the midst of its people," (Lev 20:6).

3. The third clause is "...and darkness was upon the face of the deep," (Gen 1:2), i.e. in the beginning before God created light. The abyss is called the deep, in which is not seen the brightness of the sun or the moon. So the heart of man is called an abyss, because it is not able to be known or seen, only by God. "The heart [of man is]... unsearchable, who can know it? I am the Lord who search the heart," (Jer 17:10). The heart of Joachim and Anna was an abyss of sadness, because they did not have children. But like humble people they hid their sadness in their heart. Darkness comes over the face of the abyss, when Joachim experienced such a great embarrassment in the temple when the priest refused to accept his offering. He shunned him, and with great commotion had him thrown out of the temple, since he was of advanced age, and he was sterile and infertile according to the law, Deuteronomy ch. 7, "No one shall be barren among you of either sex, neither of men nor cattle," (Dt 7:14). They say that St. Anna left the temple and went home to comfort her husband over that great sadness, but she did not find him

there. Joachim, out of shame went off to his shepherds, and wept there. Anna too wept, and she feared for her husband, "and darkness was upon the face of the deep."

Morally. Here instruction for both men and women. Men have here a lesson in patience. If a priest now expels a nobleman from the church and excommunicates him, what do you say? Most likely, he persecutes the priest saying, "Shut up you priest. Otherwise you will suffer punishment!" Not so Joachim. Patiently he withdrew, keeping counsel of the scriptures, "Revenge not yourselves, my dearly beloved; but give place unto wrath," (Rom 12:19).

Women to are instructed by this. When they see their husband saddened, because sometimes from grave business matters he is saddened, they should comfort their husband. But there are some wives, rabid, who augment the sadness for their husband, blaming the husband for everything. Therefore be warned, because a women has been given as a helper for her man. "It is not good for man to be alone: let us make him a help like unto himself," (Gen 2:18).

4. The fourth clause is "And the spirit of God moved over the waters," (Gn 1:2). See here the promise to Joachim of the child, the Virgin Mary, when he was with his shepherd, and was weeping, saying, "Lord, if this sterility comes from my sinfulness, show me, etc. " The same with Anna. Over these waters of tears the spirit of God moved, an angel – "Who makes your angels spirits," (Ps 103:4), and (Heb 1:7) – who came to Joachim. He was afraid, because flesh cannot handle the sight of a spirit. He feared like a lamb who before a lion. It is told how the angel revealed to him that he would have a daughter. The same angel told Anna.

Morally, we are instructed here to have patience. Joachim and Anna were childless for twenty years. They gave alms, prayed, etc. and did not get what they wanted, but because they had patience in the shame inflicted on them by a priest, they immediately received the promise and got a child. It is clear therefore that for the one who wishes to obtain something from God, whether health, or remission of sins, or children, patience is of greater value than anything else. Joachim could have vindicated himself toward that priest, but he chose not to, and so too should you act. And the greater are the injuries forgiven, so much quicker shall you get what you want. So the Apostle says, "For patience is necessary for you;" to obtain what you seek, "that, doing the will of God, you may receive the promise," (Heb 10:36).

5. The fifth clause is, "And God said: Be light made," (Gen 1:3). Behold, the conception of the Virgin Mary. It is believed that Anna and her husband were using separate beds, because the saints of old did not use their marriage rights unless for the sake of children, and when they learned that the wife was pregnant, they separated until after the weaning of the child, who nursed about three years. The mothers themselves nourished them, and the mothers wanted to nurse them, because that is why God gave breasts to a woman, not to show them off to men. Just as the womb of a wife is the bedroom (camera) of a child, so the breasts are the pantry. Realizing that they couldn't have children Anna and Joachim, I believe, took separate beds.

So it is said, "Be light made." The blessed generation of the Virgin Mary is called "light," because it happened without the shadow of sin. Now in the generation of children there are many shadows because of carnal intention and the corrupt mind of the parents. But the generation of the Virgin Mary was like light. About this light we read, 2 Kgs 23: "As the light of

the morning, when the sun rises, shines in the morning without clouds," (v 4). So that coming together of Joachim and Anna was luminous.

Morally. Here those are instructed about marriage, who in the procreation of children ought to have the intention of a preacher, who by the seed of the word of God generates children of God from children of the devil, because those who were children of the devil through pride, he makes children of God through humility, etc.. Such should be the intention of those contracting marriage, that they might beget children for the service of God. Otherwise they are judged before God to be adulterers, like the preacher who does not care about his results, but out of the vainglory of praise or friendships, is called an adulterer, because he cares more about his salary than about the fruit in the people. And so the Apostle says 2Cor, 2: "For we are not like many," – note "many," – "adulterating the word of God," (v 17), who in preaching seek not spiritual fruit but human favor. Therefore in having children you are ordering your intention to God, because otherwise the devil has power over them. Authority: "For they who in such manner receive matrimony, as to shut out God from themselves, and from their mind, and to give themselves to their lust, as the horse and mule, which have not understanding, over them the devil has power," (Tob 6:17).

6. The sixth clause is, "And light was made," (Gen 1:3). Behold, the sanctification of the Virgin Mary. Do not believe that it was like it is with us, because we are conceived and are born and nourished in sin. If we had died before baptism, we would have been damned – understand in limbo. But immediately after her body was formed and soul created then she was sanctified. And so the feast of her conception is celebrated, because "Light was made," of sanctification in her. Immediately the angels and heaven celebrated a feast of her conception. And so David says, "Light is risen to the just," Christ, that she might become his mother, "and [joy] to the right of heart," the angels, who cannot be inclined to sin, inclined neither to the right through prosperity, nor to the left through adversity, nether forward by attractions, nor backwards by rancors. And so he says "Joy to the right of heart. Rejoice, you just, in the Lord: and give praise to the remembrance of his holiness," (Ps 96:11-12).

7. The seventh clause is, "And God saw the light that it was good," (Gn 1:4). Behold, the birth of the Virgin Mary. Note he "saw," that is, he made to see because he knew her, and he made to see that she was good:

Good for the angels, because through her their cathedral was repaired,  
good for men, because through her they have redemption,  
good for sinners, because through her pardon is gained,  
good for the just, because through her they obtained perseverance in good works and  
growth of grace in merits and introduction to glory,  
good for the holy fathers because through her they obtained liberation,  
good for the souls in purgatory, because through her they have suffrage,  
good for sailors because through her they arrive safely to their port,  
good for laborers on the land, because through her they attain rest.

It is told how the feast of the birth of the Virgin came into the recognition of men through that holy man, as is told, in the Lombard Legend [[James of Voragine, Golden Legend](#)]. About this

birthday we can explain allegorically that text of Esther, 8: "But to the Jews a new light seemed to rise," (v 16).

8. The eighth clause is, "And he divided the light from the darkness," (Gen 1:4). This when she was presented in the temple. Darkness signifies the worldly people, from their worldly transactions. "For behold darkness shall cover the earth, and a mist the people," (Isa 100:2). From this darkness God separates the light, the Virgin Mary. It is told that at the presentation of the Virgin Mary by her parents in the temple, after she had completed three years, they fulfilled the vow which they had made. Girls remained at the temple, like virgins in a nunnery. It is said how she ascended fifteen steps, helped by friends of the groom when she should enter the church as if saying, "This one now is ours." So the angels did for the Virgin Mary. Jerome mentions these fifteen steps, how a virgin ought to be of such sanctity that she might ascend into heaven over the nine orders of angels and she also would ascend over the six orders of saints. This is prefigured in the fifteen steps before the temple of Solomon, and so was fulfilled the prophecy of Solomon saying, "Many daughters," angelic creatures and human, "have gathered together riches: you have surpassed them all," (Prov 31:29).

Morally. This is said against those who do not care to fulfill a vow. For there are many who in times of trouble make vows, and afterwards do not bother to fulfill them. This is to wish to deceive God. O how many are the merchants, how many the mariners, to whom the Virgin has given help and aided them in their necessities, and still they do not bother to fulfill their vows! Also how many are there who cannot have children, who promise that if they have a child, they will devote him or her to God's service. And after they have a child, and do not care. If you have vowed God anything, do not delay to fulfill it. An unfaithful and stupid promise displeases him. If you have promised it within a certain time period, fulfill it earlier. If no time has been assigned, then it is understood that it is to be fulfilled right away.

9. The ninth clause is, "And he called the light Day, and the darkness Night;" (Gen 1:5). To understand this it must be noted that the nobles of old would present their daughters in the temple, and there they would be taught under a holy woman. And other girls compared to the Virgin are called "night." Reason: because their intention and heart was set on worldly things. But the heart of Virgin Mary on spiritual things. It is told that after the Virgin Mary was in the temple for ten years, and she was then fourteen years old, the priest, according to the custom, said that all girls of fourteen years should go the homes of their parents to prepare for marriage. All girls, except the Virgin, having a mundane hearts, were joyful saying, "Thank God, now I can be the lady of the house, and I can do this and that," – behold the vanities, and for this reason they are called darkness. However the Virgin Mary stood out like a bright light, about whom there already was the greatest reputation of sanctity, and often she saw angels, saying that she should take a vow of virginity, because by her parents, she had been dedicated for the service to God, she was not vain like the rest. And so it is said, "And he called the light Day," etc.

A moral question is this. In this time there was not a monastery of nuns, nor could a virgin remain longer in the temple. Where therefore did she intend to live, keeping her virginity? It is said that in the home of her parents. And in this way they, although few in number, could preserve virginity. And this advice the Apostle gives, saying, "Now concerning virgins, I have no commandment of the Lord; but I give counsel, as having obtained mercy of the Lord, to be

faithful. I think therefore that this is good for the present necessity, that it is good for a man so to be. Are you bound to a wife? seek not to be loosed. Are you loosed from a wife? seek not a wife. But if you take a wife, you have not sinned. And if a virgin marry, she has not sinned: nevertheless, such shall have tribulation of the flesh. But I spare you. This therefore I say, brethren; the time is short; it remains, that they also who have wives, be as if they had none," ( 1Cor 7:25-29). And they did not welcome familiarity with a man, and so they kept their virginity, then more than now in monasteries. Be warned girls and devout women, avoid excessive familiarity, because it inclines a person to evil.

10. The tenth clause is, "And there was evening and morning one day," (Gen 1:5). "Evening" is said to be the end of the day. Behold Joseph, an old man. "Morning," the Virgin Mary, a youth of 14 years. "One day," their engagement. Practically it is said how the priest replied to the Virgin Mary saying, "This manner is unusual," etc. But the virgin prudently repeated saying, "Father you offer human custom. Is it not divine authority greater saying, 'Vow ye, and pay to the Lord your God,' (Ps 75:12), as David said?" The story relates how the priest took counsel about this and it was concluded that in a matter so novel, God would be consulted. He showed from the holy of holies of the priest that his will was that this virgin would have a spouse of the tribe of David. And so the priest made a proclamation that each [of her prospective husbands] should bring their staffs and place them on the altar. Note in the [Lombard Legend](#). The young men were called carnal. What about the virgin? about that Mary so beautiful? O blessed shall he be he who shall have so beautiful and uniquely rich parent. Each of them prepared himself...Joseph however thought, "Although I be of the tribe of David, nevertheless because I am so old, and I am poor and the virgin is young and rich..." Thinking these and similar thoughts he did not bother to bring forward his staff, saying the young men would say about me, "Old man, it is said that you have been married, and still you are coming to get a wife!! The story goes that no sign was revealed. And the priests prayed again etc. to whom God said the he for whom the virgin is meant has not brought his staff. Again they all came with their staffs, and then the staff of Joseph flowered, and fructified with almonds, and the Holy Spirit in the image of a dove descended on him. They say that the Virgin Mary prayed that God would give her an honest spouse, that he might be a father for her, and not a carnal youth. When it was told to her that the old man was to be her spouse, she rejoiced much. Today if an old man proposes to young girl, she says, "O what will I do with this one? No way!" Not so the Virgin Mary. Behold how it happened "evening and morning one day." David: "For better is one day," – of this marriage – "in thy courts above thousands," (Ps 83:11). And the prophecy of Isaiah was fulfilled, "And there shall come forth a rod," cut through [per] Joseph, "out of the root of Jesse," because Joseph was of the tribe of David, "and a flower shall rise up out of his root," (Isa 11:1).

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See: James of Voragine, Golden Legend --" the Lombard historian"

On the nativity of Mary

<http://www.aug.edu/augusta/iconography/goldenLegend/maryNativity.htm>