

C166 De Incarnatione filii Dei. Sermo

St. Vincent Ferrer -- Sermon On the Incarnation (Lk 1:26-38)

Luke 1:26-38, Douay transl., especially:

- Behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shalt bring forth a son; and thou shalt call his name Jesus (v. 31)...
- And behold thy cousin Elizabeth, she also hath conceived a son in her old age (v. 36)...
- And Mary said: Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word, (v.38).

"Ecce, ecce, ecce." Behold, behold, behold. The words of this theme are gathered from today's gospel of the feast, which is originally found in Luke 1:31. Today's solemnity is totally about the most holy Incarnation of the Son of God in the womb of the Virgin, and so is my sermon. To honor the Son of God and his mother, and for the comfort of our souls, we humbly offer our greeting to the Virgin, the same which was spoken today by the angel Gabriel etc. [Hail Mary, etc.]

Some might wonder where this theme is found. It seems that it is not in the gospel, nor in the epistle. I say that it is sifted out of the gospel, in which "behold" is said three times, not without deep secrets and mysteries.

The first is when the angel announced to the Virgin that she would be the mother of God saying "Behold, you shall conceive in your womb, and give birth to a son." (Lk 1:31).

The second is when he announced to the Virgin that Elizabeth had conceived, saying, "Behold, Elizabeth your cousin, has conceived a son in her old age." (v. 36)

The third is when the Virgin finally consented and said, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Be it done to me according to your word," (v. 38)

Here is where we get the proposed theme. It calls for a demonstrative sermon. Grammaticus [[Donatus, Ars minor](#)] says, "[Words] of demonstrating, like: See!, Behold!" And it is also exhortative. "Behold" is said three times, because magnitude, height and depth – all three – must be contemplated acutely and astutely in the Incarnation:

- I. Divine kindness [Divinalis benignitas]
- II. Human utility. [Humanalis utilitas]
- III. Virginal humility. [Virginalis humilitas]

Open, then, the ears of your heart to contemplate with great devotion and affection these three aforesaid topics.

I. DIVINE KINDNESS

First, the divine kindness is acutely contemplated from this blessed incarnation which God has shown us in this holy incarnation. That God, out of love of us has become man, is greater than if gold had turned to dirt, or mud into lead. The Creator has become the creature; the king, the servant; and the Lord, the slave; the rich man, the pauper; the almighty, the weak; the eternal, temporal; the infinite, out of love for us has become finite; and tiny like an ant, in humanity; the immense one, confined to the Virgins womb; the invulnerable, vulnerable. No mind can handle or comprehend this kindness. He does all this to help our weakness. Behold, the divine kindness. For this reason almost all the prophecies speaking of this matter begin with the word: "Behold." David says: "For behold God is my helper, and the Lord is the protector of my soul," (Ps 53:6).

About this help, remember the story of a great king, who had a vineyard alongside of his palace. He sent farmhands there, promising them a big salary if they could finish the work that same day,

otherwise they would get nothing. The laborers worked furiously, but as evening drew near they still had about half left to do. The son of the king saw through his window that they could not finish, wished to help them. He went into his room, and in disguise put on the clothes of a farmhand, and helped them, and they finished, and in the end they got their pay. Does it not seem to you to be a great kindness in the firstborn son of the king, to humble himself so much, that the workers could have the money promised to them?

Such was the humility of the Son of God. The vineyard of the king is this world. "The vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel," (Is 5:7), to which he sends workers: the patriarchs, and prophets. He promises them a salary if they would finish before sunset, i.e. before death. They would enter into the kingdom of heaven. The Son of God, Jesus Christ, seeing through the window of his knowledge that they could not gain the prize of glory, because our works are meritorious from the death of Christ and his merit, and before the death of Christ no one, however holy, could enter heaven. The gate was closed. So the son of the king entered the room of the Virgin's womb, today, where he was clothed with the uniform of that farmer, Adam, so that he could help them who would work continuously right up to their death. See why he says, "For behold God is my helper," with the help of grace in the present time; "and the Lord is the protector of my soul," in eternal glory, (Ps. 53:6).

Isaiah, too, gives a sign of this incarnation and says, beginning with the word "behold:" "Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel," (Is 7:14). Note: "Behold a virgin shall conceive." Although he could have assumed flesh from other women, nevertheless he assumed it from a virgin. "And bear a son," not the Father, because he never was a man, nor is, and never shall he be. Also neither the Holy Spirit. But she "bears a son." It is more fitting that the Son be incarnated, if we wish to attend to the purpose of this Incarnation, which is that sinners and enemies become the friends of God, and sons of God, and inheritors or co-heirs of the kingdom. The Apostle touches on this reason saying "For whom he foreknew, he also predestinated to be made conformable to the image of his Son; that he might be the firstborn amongst many brethren," (Rom 8:29). Note: "Emmanuel", "Ema," i.e. "with us." "El," i.e. "God." Thus "Emmanuel," means "God is with us," for otherwise unless he were God, man could not save himself. Therefore, among all the prophets, this one especially is to be studied.

And when the angel greeted her, she was reading this prophecy, as Mary told Elizabeth. At that moment the Virgin was thinking to herself, "O Lord, what will this virgin be like? Who would be worthy to conceive the son of God, to be the mother of God and the queen of heaven?" And she prayed to God that it not be delayed so that she might see her and be able to serve her, saying "Lord preserve my sight, that I might see her, my hearing, that I might hear her, my speech that I might speak to her, my hands that I might serve her. O blessed shall that virgin be," and she wept, unable out of humility to think about herself, that she might be the one.

And when she was thinking these things, suddenly Gabriel the archangel entered without opening the doors. Utterly radiant and beautiful, with great reverence he greeted the Virgin saying "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women," (Lk 1:28). When she heard this she was disturbed by his message, not by the vision of the angel, because Jerome says that she was accustomed to seeing angels, but she was upset by his words.

Before the coming of the angel the Virgin was thinking about that virgin and about that great grace. Suddenly the angel greeted her saying, "Hail, full of grace," which is to say, "You are that virgin full of grace."

Second, she was thinking about her great closeness with God, that she would be his mother. And so the angel said to her, "The Lord is with thee," in a greater closeness than with other creatures.

Third she was thinking of the excellence of that virgin over other women. and so the angel said to her "Blessed are you among women." And "she was troubled at his saying," [Lk 1:29] If the angel had greeted her in the usual way, as good people greet others, she would not have been disturbed. But when she heard this salutation...

[Morally] Here is an example for you, young women. If someone greets you in a usual manner, you should not be upset but return the greeting in the usual fashion. But if some fool [stultus] greets you in an unusual manner, you do not have to reply, unless by saying "What do you have to do with me etc.," because such a greeting is unseemly [iniqua], like when he says "God be with you, lily blossom, paradise flower, gracious angel, you are my life," etc. If the Virgin was disturbed by an unusual greeting from an angel with whom she cannot sin, how much more ought you to be disturbed by this unusual line from foolish men?

And the angel putting her at ease said, "Fear not, Mary," because in this greeting there is no sin, "for you have found grace with God," add "over all creatures." Now that the Virgin was at ease, the angel explained his communiqué [ambasiatam], beginning with "behold," saying,

1. "Behold you shall conceive in your womb,
2. and shall bring forth a son;
3. and you shall call his name Jesus
4. He shall be great,
5. and shall be called the Son of the most High;
6. and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of David his father;
7. and he shall reign in the house of Jacob for ever.
8. And of his kingdom there shall be no end," (vv. 31-33).

See, the whole message, which has eight clauses containing the secrets of the Christian faith, which the angel then explained to her.

1. CONCEPTION

First where he says, "Behold you shall conceive in your womb," someone might say, "Why is it necessary to say 'in the womb,' when there is no conception anywhere else? Just as why is it necessary to say 'You see with your eyes,' since one does not see with other parts?" I reply, that it is not without reason that the angel said, "Behold, you shall conceive in your womb," because Mary, before the arrival of the angel had conceived God in the mind by contemplating that prophecy. But the angel, revealing to her a maternal conception said, "You shall conceive in your womb," not only in your mind, in which you have already conceived, but "in you womb," declaring to her the manner of the conception, like a hazelnut conceives its seed without breaking etc. If someone says, "Nature does this." Cannot God, who makes a virgin pregnant, do more? [Iam bene est bestia. Et numquid potest plus deus qui virginem gravidavit?] And when the Virgin Mary understood this, think how she rejoiced.

2. Birth

Second he says "And you shall bring forth a son." Behold, the birth. For you shall bring forth a Son, not a Father, because the Father neither is, nor will be a man; nor the Holy Spirit. But if someone says, "How is it possible, since the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one in essence, indivisible, that the Son assumes humanity and becomes a man, since they are one entity?" It is explained by a likeness to the one sun, in which the Father can be considered generating, a substance, and the Son begotten, the rays, and the Spirit, exhaled, the heat, and yet there is only one sun, and when the rays are passing through the glass window, red or another color, the rays receive that color, and not the substance of the sun, nor its heat. So, the Virgin Mary is a window clearer than crystal. Thus the church sings "[The heaven's window you are made...](#)" And through her passes the ray of the eternal sun, the Son of God, entering to illuminate the house of this world, without breaking the window, indeed it remains even brighter. And when the angel says "And you shall bring forth a son," the Virgin understands that she would be the mother not of the Father, nor of the Holy Spirit, but of the Son.

3. Passion

The third clause is where he says, "You shall call his name Jesus." Behold, his passion. Because "Jesus," is the same as "savior", by whose passion we have been saved. Thus Gregory says, "The birth would have profited us nothing, unless there had been the advantage of being redeemed." And when the Virgin heard this name, Jesus, from the angel, I believe that she bowed down. Reason: Because the ancient prophets held him in great reverence. Isaiah says, "Your name, and your remembrance are the desire of the soul. My soul has desired you in the night," (Is 26:8-9). So it is a laudable custom to bow when "Jesus" is named. If preachers when they preach before the pope bow when the address him, how much more when the supreme Pope is named?

4 Descent

. Fourth: "He shall be great." Behold, the descent into hell. Because just as he was great in heaven before the Incarnation, he ought also to be shown to be great on earth before men through miracles, he wished also to show his greatness in hell by striving against it and by leading out holy fathers out of it.

5. Resurrection

Fifth where "[He] shall be called the Son of the most High." Behold, the resurrection. The philosophers say that the definition of man has one genus and two differences, because man is a rational mortal animal. Before the passion, however, Christ was rational and mortal, and so can be called the "Son of Man," but only after the resurrection should he be called the "Son of the Most High" because he is immortal and invulnerable.

6. Ascension

Sixth when he says, "...and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of David his father." Behold, his miraculous ascension. Because just as the throne of David was higher by excellence and power over other kings of his domain, so Christ in his ascension was placed on a throne of glory to reign over all creatures.

7. Eucharist

Seventh where he says, "...and he shall reign in the house of Jacob for ever" Behold, the sacrament of the Eucharist. The church is called the house of Jacob in which there is a struggle

against the devil through humility. This is with respect to men's understanding; we who do not know the last day of the world. The first day in which no Mass will be said in this world, that day shall be the last day of the world. We get this from that text of Christ. "And behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world," (Mt 28:20). And so David says "The Lord is in his holy temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven," (Ps 10:5).

8. Judgment

Eighth, where he says, "...and of his kingdom," whether of glory or of punishment, "there shall be no end." Behold, the general judgment. He shall reign over the wicked and condemned with the rigor of justice, because they shall never be freed from their punishments. He shall reign over the good and blessed with the sweetness of mercy in heaven without end. Of this clause David prophesied saying, "Your kingdom is a kingdom of all ages: and your dominion endures throughout all generations," (Ps 144:13), namely of those to be saved, and the generation, namely of those to be damned. Now we have the first "behold" of this communiqué.

II. HUMAN UTILITY

Second, its human usefulness should be acknowledged. Do not believe that he became incarnate for his own good and advantage, because he did not need our goods, as David says, but for our advantage [utilitate], because all good radically proceeds from the incarnation of the Son of God, like flowers and fruits of the tree are generated from the root, so all good, and especially those of faith and obedience, proceed from the root of the incarnation, because granting this, all the other articles of faith become easy to believe, because it is no wonder if he has been born of a woman, that he is man. Also you believe that he works a miracle. Practically speaking, no wonder from one who is God. The same can be said of all the articles of faith pertaining to Christ's humanity or divinity. It is clear therefore that the incarnation of Christ is the root or the gates of all the other articles of faith. Because of this Christ said, "You believe in God, believe also in me," (Jn 14:1), with respect to the humanity.

Also in the blessed incarnation of the Son of God, all good is from supernatural obedience. Of old there was no teacher who did not err on the way, whom we could follow, because neither Moses, because he sinned, nor others. Only Jesus, who on this day [Feast of the Incarnation], takes on humanity that he might be visible, so that we can follow him. Thus Augustine said, "God must be followed, who cannot be seen; man must not be followed, who can be seen," (Augustine Sermon on Nativity, in Aquinas, [Summa, III, q.1, a.2](#)). So then, that there might be a man who could be seen by man, and whom a man might follow. For this reason God has become man.

Also for the usefulness and good of our redemption, in the blessed incarnation, the whole beginning of our redemption was situated in the pocket [bursa] of the virginal womb, and the price was paid in the passion. So David said, "He has sent redemption to his people," (Ps 110: 9).

Also from the usefulness and good of our salvation, which proceeds from the incarnation, comes about the restoration in heaven and on earth. The reason is, like a balance, when one part goes down, the other part rises, so the Son of God humbled himself so that he might exalt us. As Gregory says, "God, who in the humility of your Son, raises the fallen world, grant perpetual joy to your faithful, eternal joy, that the number of angels be replenished."

And this the angel indicated to the Virgin when he said to her the second "Behold." "And behold your cousin Elizabeth, she also has conceived a son in her old age," (Lk 1:36) Literal sense. The Glosses and commentaries [postillae] say that the angel said this to comfort the Virgin. But spiritually it is understood thus. The name "Elizabeth" in Hebrew is composed of three Hebrew names: "El" i.e. God, "I", i.e. me, and "Zabeth" i.e. seventh. "Elizabeth," means "seventh of my God." This "seventh of my God" is human nature. In the beginning God created: 1) the earth with the trees, 2) water with the fishes, 3) air with its properties, 4) fire with its qualities, 5) heaven with the planets, and 6) angelic nature. Seventh he formed human nature. See, the "seventh of my God".

This woman was sterile her whole life, because she was not able to conceive until now, in her old age. Note that seven are the ages of the world or of mankind. First is infancy. This was from Adam to Noah. Second, childhood. This was from Noah to Abraham. Third is adolescence. This was from Abraham to Moses. Fourth is youth. This was from Moses to David. Fifth is maturity [virilitas]. This was from David to the Babylonian captivity [transmigrationem]. Sixth is old age. From the Captivity to the incarnation of Christ. The seventh is decrepitude. This shall last from Christ to the end of the world. And in this [age] Elizabeth, i.e. human nature, conceived, merit for obtaining glory through faith, hope and charity. See why it is said, "Behold, Elizabeth your cousin," etc. Likewise Isaiah said, "In your presence, O Lord. We have conceived, and been as it were in labor, and have brought forth the spirit...of salvation," (Is 26:17-18).

III. VIRGINAL HUMILITY

Third, we are reminded of the virginal humility, when the third "behold" is said. After the angel had proposed to her his communiqué, that she would be the mother of God, the Queen of Heaven, etc., with the greatest humility she responded saying: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to your word," (Lk 1:38).

Think how on bended knees and with tears of joy, she said these words, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord." Note devoutly that when the Virgin Mary said the first word, "Behold" she was not immediately pregnant, nor became the mother of God; neither in the second, nor in the third, etc., but in the last, namely "[according to your] word." Then, instantly, the Virgin adored God in her womb, whom she did not see with the eyes of her body, but of her mind.

It is like this also in the consecration of the host at Mass. Not in the first word, nor in the second is the body of Christ present, but in the last, and then the priest adores the "pregnant" host. Only then should you adore and not before; So did the Virgin Mary adore. The virginal humility is well contemplated here. The angel called her Lady, Mother of God and Queen of Heaven, and she calls herself Handmaid: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord," etc.

Rightly the humility of the Virgin was prefigured through that holy woman who heard the message of king David, who also wished not to become his wife, so that she would be queen, but said, "Behold, let your servant be a handmaid, to wash the feet of the servants of my lord," (1Kg 25:41). [The name,] Abigail is interpreted to mean the "exultation of my father."

Behold the Virgin Mary who brought joy to her father, Adam who was weeping because of his sin for which we all are damned. There was no little exultation in the revelation to him of the Virgin in the curse of the serpent, when God said to the devil in the guise of the serpent, "I will put

enmities between you and the woman, and your seed and her seed: she shall crush your head," (Gen 3:15).

Abigail, i.e. the exultation of my father, whom Christ the King wished in the Queen of Heaven, who responded, "Behold, let thy servant be a handmaid, to wash the feet of the servants of my lord." Note, that she might "wash the feet of the servants of my lord." That virgin washed feet.

Feet are the last members of the human body, even mystically. The status of the patriarchs was as the head of the world, the neck [the status] of the prophets; the belly [venter], of the apostles; heart and arms, of the martyrs; shins, of the doctors; thighs, of the confessors. The end of the world is the present time. We are in those "upon whom the ends of the world are come," (1Cor 10:11). And the Virgin washes us from the iniquity of our sins, and the stains, because she continuously prays for us, because otherwise we would have been destroyed. Thus the church sings to her:

Show thyself to be a Mother;
Through you may he (Jesus) receive (our) prayers;
Who, being born for us;
Undertook to be your own (Son),
(Vespers Hymn: [Ave Maris Stella](#)).