

St. Vincent Ferrer, O.P. – Sermon on Perseverance (Mt 10:22)

On perseverance in good works at all time and not only in Lent, according to the most blessed Vincent, which sermon he preached in St. Giles in Britain, where there was an abbey of monks, and it was on the day of Saints Tiburtius and Valerian (Apr. 14), Thursday of the First Sunday after the Octave of Easter

"He who shall persevere unto the end, he shall be saved," (Mt. 10:22).

Because some simpletons err saying that are we bound to live a good life only in Lent, I wish now to declare how we must live well not only in Lent but at all times. But first the Virgin Mary is saluted.

"He who shall persevere." etc. Authority: St. Gregory, an excellent doctor of the holy church wishing to declare the virtue and perfection of good works, briefly said so in his Easter homily, "The virtue of good works is perseverance." The reason is: Geometers say that the spherical figure is not perfect until the circle is completed to the point from which it began, or until the end is joined to the beginning. Give an example at hand in the manner from [compassu] So Christ is the beginning and the end of all things. Whence he says Rev 1, "I am Alpha and Omega," – The first letter of the Greek alphabet is alpha and the last, omega. In the alphabet of the Jews the first letter is aleph, the last thau.— He wishes to say, "I am Alpha and Omega," that is I am the beginning and the end of all good. If therefore Christ is the beginning of a good life, therefore it should also end in him, because "All things were made by him: and without him was made nothing that was made," Jn 1:3, otherwise it would be a minor thing to begin a good life unless it is continued. Therefore Gregory says "The virtue of a good life is perseverance." Therefore the theme says, "He who shall persevere," namely from day to day, from week to week, from month to month, from year to year, "unto the end," that is Christ, "he shall be saved," (Mt. 10:22). See the declared theme. Now, good people, out of love for you I have sought out in sacred scriptures how many ways, in general, in which we ought to persevere unto the end, and I have found in three:

First, by doing good diligently,

Second, by bearing evils patiently,

Third, by praying to God reverently

Therefore whoever shall persevere unto the end in these three, will be saved. The rest we shall see one at a time.

DOING GOOD DILIGENTLY

First I say that we ought to persevere in doing good diligently not only for Lent but at all times, each one in his own state of life: priests, religious, and laity. Do you priests know what you should do and observe? Diligently and perseveringly you should devoutly recite your office [officiare], maintain honorable associations, and celebrate with dignity. O what glory is prepared for such a priest.

Religious should keep their rule, vows, obedience, poverty, chastity and the ceremonies of the cloister. O what glory is prepared for such a religious.

The laity should keep the ten commandments and say your brief prayers [recitentur breviter]. For these a great glory is prepared, by persevering in good works up to the end. Dear people, you have heard well the reason. When a certain soul comes to the gate of heaven, God does not give him glory for a certain time, namely for one month, or year, or twenty etc., but he gives it without end. Do you want an authority? Mat 25: "The just, shall go into life everlasting." (v.46), that is, without termination and end. Therefore it makes good sense that the service should correspond to the salary, because according to the salary ought to be the service. Therefore from the fact that God gives glory, as long as he will be God, for ever and ever, you too ought to serve as long as you are a man. And this is the good proportion. You hear one beautiful authority of Christ about this matter, and about those who do the opposite, where there are two great secrets, Mat. 24, "And because iniquity hath abounded, the charity of many shall grow cold." (v, 12); "He who shall persevere unto the end, he shall be saved," (Mt. 10:22). Here are two clauses. The first "because iniquity hath abounded" etc. This clause declares why many do not persevere in a good life. He replies, "And because iniquity hath abounded, the charity of many shall grow cold."

For example. In religious who in the year of their novitiate are devout and ardent, keeping the rule and ceremonies completely, but after profession, or after a little while their devotion cools, their charity and love of God, when they witness the wickedness of others, who do not keep the rule, and who laugh at them. Therefore the good life slips, saying, "O I can do this just as well, the way the other does it, etc, or the others do it this way." Behold how by witnessing the evil and iniquity of others he pulls back. Therefore Christ says, "And because iniquity has abounded, the charity of many shall grow cold," (Mt 10:24), the many who were holding to a good life, which they let go because of seeing the evil of others.

Likewise in new priests ardent in devotion, they say their office devoutly, they fast, nor do they wish to drink in taverns, or play dice, just as it is forbidden them *Extra, de vita et hone. cleri. c. clerici. 2 Vivunt honeste*, but because the wickedness of others abound and the sins of priests living a bad life and mocking the good, the charity of the good cools, saying when he sees other wicked ones, "O and why do I not keep a mistress like the others? or why do I not act this way etc." And so because of the abundance of wickedness of the evil ones the charity of the good cools.

The same for the laity, men and women etc. Rightly it happens to such just as boiling [fervente] water in the winter, which if it is put into cold air, immediately cools and then freezes, but if it is put next to fire it does not freeze or get cold. So it is that good persons, devout and burning with charity and the love of God, when among evil people cool in their devotion, etc. Not so if they stand near the fire, namely Christ, and with good and perfect people. And check the authority which says this, Jeremiah 30: "For the multitude of your iniquity, and for your hardened sins I have done these things to you," (Jer 30:15), and it is spoken to Christianity [Christianitati]. There follows, "He who shall persevere," not caring about mockery or hurtful words, "he shall be saved," (Mt. 10:22). It is necessary that he persevere. Thus if someone

serves Christ in a good life for a hundred years, and abandons the good life one hour before death, he is damned and loses the whole service of one hundred years.

Now there is an argument to the contrary. If it is said, O it is amazing that for the lack of one hour, you would lose the service of a hundred years. For it is certain that it is not that way in the service of temporal lords, because they are paid of a time of service and subtract the time which they did not serve, otherwise it would be hardhearted [crudelis], because if they served one for one month, they were paid for one month, if for one year, they are paid for such, etc. Why therefore did Christ not do the same, since he is the epitome of mercy? Why does he impose damnation for the lack of one hour? It seems unfeeling, because he ought at least to compensate that man for that time in which he served.

I reply that it is with good reason and justly that a man is damned and punished, if he does not persevere unto the end, even if for the whole lifetime he served Christ, and failed at the end. It is reasonable and just.

To understand this better you should know, dear people, that there once was a rich merchant, who had more than a hundred thousand [francs], etc. He went to the market where he bought some extremely valuable pearls and precious jewels, and gold fabrics and things of that sort. And he spent the hundred thousand on these. Having purchased them, he tied them up in a bundle and hired a man to whom he said, "See, I have wrapped this bundle in which I have placed all my riches, and I want to go home. Will you deliver it to my house? The man replies, Indeed, how many day's [dietae, much larger than a league, a "day's journey"?) journey? The merchant says, "Ten." He tells the merchant: "You shall give me ten francs, one for every day." The merchant said, "OK [placet mihi]." This person placed the bundle of the merchant on his back and he staggered a lot. When he was in the tenth day near the home of the merchant, about a half a league away[league, about 3 miles], the bundle was digging into his shoulder and his back hurt. He said to himself, "O, this package hurts me. I'll drop it here in a field." Then he went to the home of the merchant. And the merchant seeing him cried out, "Where is my bundle?" He replied, "I brought it near the village about a half a league, and I set it down in a field. Pay me my ten francs." "O you wretched traitor, you have lost all my goods which were in that bundle. What shall I do? And he took a sword and killed him. You say, "He should have paid?" Certainly not! Rather he deserved death, because he laid it down when he was near the home.

So it is with us. Christ is the merchant, who comes from his home, paradise, to the market place of this world, to buy our precious souls. So he says to the world, "Give me the persons, and the rest take to thyself." (Gen 14:21). And he entrusts the bundle of a good life, filled with precious jewels, to him whom he inspires [tangit in corde] to live well. Whence to live and act well are works of God, and the defects are ours. Do you want an authority about this from the Old and New Testament? First from the Old: "For you have wrought all our works for us," (Isa 26:12). Second from the New, from the Apostle, Paul: "And there are diversities of operations, but the same God, who works all in all." (1 Cor 12: 6), we are only instruments. One grace is to fast, another to pray, another to confess. Therefore he said, there are "diversities of operations". And God wishes that we carry the bundle of the good life up to the gate of his house of his paradise, which gate is called the man's death, because no one enters paradise through another

gate but only through death. David, "This is the gate of the Lord, the just shall enter into it," (Psalm 117:20). Note, "of the Lord" because the gate of death is of the Lord actively and passively. Actively because he so ordains that through death we enter it. Authority Heb 10: "And as it is appointed," supply, by God, "unto men once to die," (Heb 9:27). Also it is called the gate of the Lord passively because he had to die. Luke, "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and so to enter into his glory?" (Lk 24:26). And he promised that whoever would carry the burden of a good life up to this gate of death, he would give him the salary, not ten francs, but the kingdom of paradise and eternal glory. Authority. Mat. 6: "But he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven, he shall enter into the kingdom of heaven," (Mt 7:21). Out of love of this friend, a good person carries the burden of a good life, although sometimes it is accompanied [attenditur] with labor. Nevertheless as Gregory says, "The consideration of the reward diminishes the sting of the discipline. If therefore it is set down an hour before death, you cannot ask for your salary, but you would have merited punishment and damnation, just as the servant who curses [damnificans] his Lord, etc. Therefore Christ comforting us says Mat 11: "Come to me, all you who labor, and are burdened, and I will refresh you. Take up my yoke upon you, and learn of me, because I am meek, and humble of heart: and you shall find rest for your souls." (v. 28-29). Heavier, certainly is the burden of a bad life than a good. It is clear therefore how we should persevere in good diligently, because as Christ said, Mat. 10 and 24, "He who shall persevere unto the end, he shall be saved," (Mt. 10:22).

BEARING EVILS PATIENTLY

Second, we should persevere bearing evils patiently. Gregory on the text of Luke ch. 8:15, "Bring forth fruit in patience," says, "There are no goods which we do, unless with a calm spirit we tolerate the evils of our neighbor." There are some who immediately become indignant. Therefore it is necessary to bear evils patiently, etc. And I'll tell you both the reason and authority. The reason is such. You know that this world is like a turbulent sea, because a wave of the sea does not rise high, nor low, one after the other. So in this world, there are some raised by prosperity, like lords, or great prelates, then cast down by adversity of an illness or of the loss of honor, or of friends. For as Boethius says in Book 2 of *On the Consolation of Philosophy*, prose four. No one is "... so entire happiness that he is not in some part offended with the condition of his estate?" Certainly never in this world can a man stand secure and quiet. He is like a sea which always is moving. Because if a man is laughing now, soon he will be sad. If he is in prosperity, soon in adversity. O what kind of a storm of the sea? Therefore David in Psalm 92:4 "Wonderful are the surges of the sea," namely of this world. And again in Ps 103:25, "So is this," namely, the world, "great sea," etc. Just as no one can sail the sea for a long time without encountering a storm, so neither can we live a long time without troubles. But just as a good sailor does not give up because of the storm, but is on guard against dangers of reefs, crying out, Bring the ship about when the reef threatens. Another says, O hoist the sails etc. So we on this great voyage of life to the gate of paradise have a chance of storms [fortunas tempestatis]. First from the occasion of sins, the inclination of the flesh and of the world. O how is the storm of the soul, and of the flesh, and of the world. So, like sailors, bear evil patiently, not only in a good times when there are no temptations, but also when they come either from the flesh or from the world, or from the devil about faith, etc. And then it is necessary to abstain and keep yourself strongly by praying, doing penance, and turning to God, that he would grant you firmness in the faith, because God can help. And so, "He who shall persevere unto the end, he shall be saved," (Mt. 10:22) You wish an authority for this? Paul, to the Hebrews "Persevere

under discipline." (Heb 12:7) The tribulations of this world are called "discipline", by the Apostle. Reason, because for the example of discipline it had been done, which has six [acus] or punctures. And there are three of disciplines, and each one has six punctures. The first discipline is true conversion, which has six: First is the painful contrition of the heart. Second, shame of confession. Third, the proposal of amendment. Fourth, which hurts a lot, is restitution. Fifth, the forgiveness of injuries. Sixth, the restoring of a person's good name. About which Augustine: "He should not be slow to offer healing medicine from the mouth itself whence the wound was inflicted." About this discipline, Ps 17:26, "And your discipline has corrected me unto the end," namely from sins, "and your discipline, the same shall teach me," namely, good works.

A second discipline is tribulation naturally necessary, as are illnesses which naturally come, nor can we avoid them and it has six sharp points, namely pains of the head: First is of fever. Second hunger. Third of thirst. Fourth, heat. Fifth, cold. Sixth is final, death. About this discipline scripture says, "My son, reject not the correction of the Lord: and do not faint when you art chastised by him: For whom the Lord loves, he chastises," (Prov 3:11-12). Where note that human illness, pains and miseries are called the "correction of the Lord," because he himself gives them. Reason: for correcting. Therefore, "reject [them] not" through impatience or indignation.

The third discipline is unjust and contrary persecution. Punctures are harms of the body inflicted by another, of goods, fame, friends etc. Of this discipline the apostle says, Heb 12: "Now all chastisement for the present indeed seems not to bring with it joy, but sorrow: but afterwards it will yield, to them that are exercised by it, the most peaceable fruit of justice," (Heb 12:11). So the Apostle says, where above, "'Persevere under discipline." (Heb 12:7). It follows, "God deals with you as with his sons;" (v. 7). Whence just as a father is known when several young men are doing something wrong, the father seeing his son among those in the street corrects only his son, giving him blows, not caring about the others. So it is a sign of sonship of God, when he corrects us with blows of troubles in the streets of this world. Otherwise with those whom he does not correct, it is a sign that they mean nothing to him, as Gregory says, "neither for grace nor for glory," etc.

REVERENTLY PRAYING TO GOD

Third we ought to persevere by praying to God reverently, and this morning and evening. How? So St. Thomas says [in I, q. 23, a. 8](#), and I Sent. dist. 41, a. 4, that also for those predestined they should be praying and he gives an example of the prayer of St. Stephen for Paul. And for Isaac, who prayed for Jacob still existing in the womb of his mother. Reason of this perseverance in prayer is because it is said in James ch 1: "Every best gift, and every perfect gift, is from above, coming down," (James 1:17). Note, "best," namely corporal goods, which are good insofar as they are ordained to sustenance of the body; better, because they are advantageous for the remission of sins and obtaining grace; "best", because they lead to eternal glory through works of mercy and others. Note: "every perfect good," with respect to sanctifying grace and infused virtues, "from above coming down," etc. through prayer, because prayer is like a channel or road through which the gifts of Divine mercy, both corporal and spiritual descend to us, however unworthy. Luke "Yet if he shall continue knocking," that is, praying, "I say to you, ...he will...give him as much as he needs." (Lk 11:8). I give an example from a

prince of thieves, who daily, morning and evening reverently recited the angelic salutation [Hail Mary]. And on the day which he omitted it, the devil was about to take him to hell because of the evil which he committed. Note how a hermit came to him and had him call everyone from his house, and the devil who was in the form of a man servant [coquinae] for six years, waiting for the time when he might skip saying the angelic salutation etc. See the book from the [Priory of] Scala Caeli [Cordoba]. You ought to persevere, therefore, in prayer, just as David who said in Ps 65, "Blessed be God, who has not turned away my prayer, nor his mercy from me," (Ps 65:20). Gloss, Augustine "Your prayer has not been turned away from you, and neither shall divine mercy be turned away." Amen.