

## St. Vincent Ferrer, O.P. -- Letter to Benedict XIII Concerning the End of the World

This entire chapter from *Angel of the Judgment: A Life of Vincent Ferrer*, by S.M.C., Ave Maria Press. Chapter XII, pp. 118-132, consists of a letter, to Benedict XIII taken from, the Appendix to Pere Fages' *Histoire de Saint Vincent Ferrer*.

To our most holy Lord, Benedict XIII, Pope, Brother Vincent Ferrer, Preacher, a useless servant in regard to both preaching and actions, places himself at the feet of His Holiness.

The Apostle Paul, after fulfilling the mission entrusted to him in preaching the gospel, constrained by revelation, went up to Jerusalem to confer with Peter and the rest. As he himself tells us in the Epistle to the Galatians (Ch. 2): "Then after fourteen years, I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus also with me. And I went up according to revelation and communicated to them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles; but apart from them who seemed to be something, lest perhaps I should run or had run in vain." The Apostles also returned from their God-given mission of preaching, in which they had diligently exercised themselves, and "coming together unto Jesus, related to Him all the things they had done and taught," as we read in the sixth chapter of the gospel according to Saint Mark. Therefore, in this present letter, I am explaining in all sincerity, to Your Holiness, Christ's Vicar on earth, and the successor of Saint Peter, what I have preached for so long throughout the world, especially in regard to the time of Antichrist and the end of the world; and I do this the more willingly because Your Holiness has so affectionately commanded me to do so.

Concerning these matters I have, in my sermons, been accustomed to draw four conclusions.

The first of these is that the death of Antichrist and the end of the world will occur at the same time. The shortness of the duration of the world after the death of Antichrist has led me to this conclusion, for nowhere in the whole Bible or in the writings of the Doctors can I find a longer period assigned by God for the repentance of those whom Antichrist has seduced than forty-five days after his death.

We read in the Prophecy of Daniel (Ch. 12): "And from the time when the continual sacrifice shall be taken away and the abomination of desolation shall be set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days. Blessed is he that waiteth and cometh unto one thousand three hundred and thirty-five days." Now, according to the gloss and the commentaries of the Doctors, the first number, to wit, one thousand two hundred and ninety days, equivalent to three and a half years, is the period during which Antichrist reigns as king. Now forty-five is the number which must be added to this to make one thousand three hundred and thirty-five days, and so this number, forty-five, is understood by the Doctors to refer to the duration of the world after the death of Antichrist.

Some people, certainly, are dubious about this, and for two reasons. In the first place they raise the question as to whether the number forty-five refers to solar days or days of a year's duration, since in some passages of Scripture a day is meant to signify a year. But I can see no reason for this being the case in the instance under consideration, since both numbers occur in the same

connection, and it is hardly likely that one should stand for annual and the other for solar days. For the Scripture text (Ezekiel Ch. 38) manifestly implies that after the death of Antichrist elsewhere called Gog there will not be a year before the end.

Other people are doubtful as to whether the duration of the world after the death of Antichrist be not longer than forty-five days since the Scripture does not expressly deny this. But as the Bible does not mention any determinate time other than forty-five days, it seems unreasonable to suppose that there should be more than forty-five days after the death of Antichrist. If people argue that in so short a time his death could not be published throughout the world in order that the nations might be converted and do penance, some answer that this period of forty-five days will not begin until after the death of Antichrist has been published. Others argue that God, who has ordained that number of days to enable people to repent, will suddenly, either by means of angels or through some terrible portent, make known to the whole world the death of Antichrist.

The second conclusion I draw is that until Antichrist is actually born, the time of his birth will be hidden from mankind. This conclusion is supported by two texts of holy Scripture: the first in the gospel of Saint Matthew (Ch. 24), where His disciples ask Christ: "Tell us when these things shall come to pass, and what will be the sign of Thy coming and of the end of the world?" Later in the same chapter Christ answers: "The day and the hour no man knoweth, nor the angels." The second text is in the Acts (Ch. 1), where the disciples ask the same thing and say: "Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore the Kingdom of Israel?" And Christ answers: "It is not for you to know the times nor the moments." These words must be carefully weighed: "It is not for you to know the times nor the moments." It is as if one were to say to the Spanish army and its allies: "It is not your concern to know the time nor the day when there will be war in Tartary or Armenia, since you have no interests in these places which would make such knowledge pertinent." But on the contrary, it is most vital for the Tartars and Armenians, themselves, even the peasants, to know the time of such a war so that they may be forewarned.

So, even though there were the most illuminating revelations of the divine Wisdom concerning these matters, it was not necessary for the Apostles and Doctors of the first ages of the Church to know the time of the coming of Antichrist and the end of the world; but after his birth it is expedient for men, even though they be sinners, or so ignorant as to know nothing of the Apostles and Doctors, to know of this birth, so that they may be forewarned and prepared. This is in accordance with the wisdom, mercy and knowledge of God, who from the beginning of the world was accustomed to send messengers to warn men of any great tribulation about to come to pass. Noah was warned before the deluge, Moses before the liberation of Israel, Amos before the destruction of Egypt, and so on. The Saints, Dominic and Francis, and their respective Orders are warned before the coming of Antichrist and the end of the world, since of both of them the liturgy says, that they are supposed to precede the destruction of the world.

The truth of this conclusion demonstrates the falsity of two opinions. One is the dictum that the same length of time ought to pass after the Incarnation until the end of the world, as elapsed from the creation to the Incarnation. Exponents of this opinion base it on the words of Habakkuk (Ch. 3): "O Lord, Thy work is in the midst of the years, bring it to life. In the midst of the years Thou shalt make it known; when Thou art angry Thou wilt remember mercy."

But this is not in accordance with the gospel texts just quoted, for, since the Doctors agree that the length of time from the creation to the Incarnation was known to the prophets, the Apostles and the Church of God, if it is true that the Incarnation is midway between the beginning and the end, it follows that the time of the end of the world will also be known. This verse of Habakkuk should be understood, not of the middle years of the world, but of any human life which, according to Ps. 89, commonly lasts for seventy years.

And so the middle years of a man's life will be about the age of thirty-three, the age at which Christ suffered. For Our Lord did not will to die as a little one by the hand of Herod, neither did He intend to die in old age, but in the midst of His life; that is at the time of the greatest virility. And so, in this way, in the midst of the years, God gave life to His work by the death of His Son and made known the work of His mercy, since before that time He was angry with the human race. In this sense, Isaiah, speaking in the person of Christ, says: "I have said in the midst of my days I will go down into hell." For Christ, dying in the flower of His manhood, straightway descended into hell (limbo) for the liberation of the just.

Or if the words of Habakkuk are taken to mean the middle years of the world's existence, the term does not here imply an equality between the preceding and subsequent times, but should be understood as the middle of interposition. For although the destruction of human life took place in the beginning of time, yet its reparation should not be withheld until the end of time, but should take place between these two terminals. The blessed Gregory uses this mode of speaking when he says that Christ rose from the dead in the middle of the night, since He rose at dawn which stands between the beginning of night and its end, that is by interposition not equality.

Others say that there will be as many years from the birth of Christ to the end of the world as there are verses in the psalter. Thus the exponents of this theory suggest that the first verse of the first psalm *Beatus vir* is a prophecy of the first year after the Nativity, and the second verse a prophecy of the second one and so on. This opinion, however, must be rejected like the first, as it has no foundation except in presumption of heart.

The third conclusion to which I have come is that the coming of Antichrist and the end of the world are near. We may draw this conclusion from the revelation made to the two Saints, Dominic and Francis, and also to many others when these two patriarchs came before the Sovereign Pontiff to ask for the confirmation of their Orders. There is, for instance, the incident of the three lances with which Christ threatened the destruction of the world, as we read at greater length in the histories of these two saints.\*

\*An extract from Saint Vincent's sermon on the Feast of Saint Dominic, which gives this incident in detail is not without interest. One night, when the Blessed Dominic was praying in a certain church, while the Blessed Francis was in another, Christ was shown to them with three lances intending to destroy the world. Whilst, however, these saints were saying within themselves: "Oh, is there no saint in heaven who will appease Christ's anger?" suddenly the Virgin Mary appeared, just as a woman might do to snatch her child from the jaws of a wolf. "Oh Son," she said, "are you now carrying lances in those hands which are accustomed to carry nails for the salvation of the world?" In the hearing of Dominic and Francis, Christ answered: "Mother mine, what more is there that I ought to do, since I have poured so many graces on the world? I have sent patriarchs and prophets, and they slew them; finally I came myself to redeem the world. Now I will no longer spare it." These three lances are the three great tribulations shortly to come on the world, namely the coming of Antichrist, the burning up of the world, and the judgment by Jesus Christ. Now this world is the traitor son of God, acting contrary to His commands, and driving our God his Father

from the world as far as he is able. The general of the heavenly armies, Christ, will kill them with the three lances mentioned before. For, in the time of Dominic the world was on the point of being destroyed by Christ, when the Virgin Mary placed Dominic there, obtaining one reprieve. Think how the whole world is involved in this one reprieve, which is not of certain duration but given conditionally, that is, on conversion. If it is converted, then all is well; if not it will not be spared again.

If the words of Christ and of His Blessed Mother are well studied, these three lances for the destruction of the world are: first, the persecution of Antichrist, second, the destruction of the world by fire, third, the Last Judgment.

The same conclusion is reached with more exactitude by studying the revelation made to Saint John in the Apocalypse (Ch. 20) : "I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand, and he seized the dragon, the old serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and after that he must be loosed for a short time." The ordinary gloss explains this shutting up and binding chiefly by the death of Christ on the Cross and His descent into hell, and reckons a thousand years to mean a multitude of years, taking the determinate to signify the indeterminate, that is that a thousand years is looked upon as signifying the whole time from the death of Christ to the coming of Antichrist, when Satan will be loosed for the temptation and seduction of mankind. Nevertheless, this binding of Satan may be very properly understood of his binding, lest he should have tempted or seduced the nations by means of the persecution of the faithful under the Roman emperors. This binding occurred in the time of the blessed Pope Sylvester when Constantine became a Christian and gave the Church her patrimony. For, from that time until the founding of the Orders of Franciscans and Dominicans is a thousand years, and after that Satan must be loosed. According to this theory, the Angel descending to bind Satan is held to be Pope Sylvester, or rather Christ acting through him.

There are several opinions which run contrary to this conclusion. One affirms that there will be a drought of forty years duration before the end of the world. This is untenable because in that case the burning of the world would come about as a natural consequence of the exceeding dryness. For, as the deluge did not occur in the ordinary course of events, but through a divine judgment, so also this deluge of fire will be a direct outcome of the divine power; for, according to the Doctors, it will find men living in great prosperity and the world in a state of tranquility, and, according to Saint Jerome, the fire will burn all matter, even water and the sea.

Others affirm that Elias and Enoch will come before the advent of Antichrist, in order to preach and to warn men against his deceptions. This is false, as may be seen from the Apocalypse (Ch. 11), where it is said of the followers of Antichrist, "And the holy city they shall tread under foot two and forty months. And I will give unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and sixty days in sackcloth." Now, Elias and Enoch, properly speaking, will not come before the advent of Antichrist, but at the same time, as it is evident both from the text and the gloss that he had already begun to reign.

Others affirm that the gospel signs ought to precede the coming of Antichrist. According to Saint Luke: "There shall be signs in the sun and in the moon," etc. These signs, however, properly speaking, will occur after the death of Antichrist and immediately before the judgment.

Another objection is that Jerusalem and the Holy Land will be conquered by the Christians before the coming of Antichrist. Many texts from the Prophet Ezekiel (Ch 32), and the acts of the Martyr Methodius, seem at first sight to imply that, at the advent of Antichrist, the Holy Land will be in the hands of Christians. But this conquest has already been partially realized by Christian princes, notably by Godfrey de Bouillon; nor does it appear that the numbers and disposition of Christians are such as to enable them to carry the conquest to its conclusion. In fact, the text of Saint Luke ( Ch. 21) seems to contradict this: "Jerusalem shall be trodden under foot by the peoples, until the times of the nations shall be fulfilled." The words of Ezekiel and Methodius should be understood more in the light of an allegory of the Church Militant and its numbers than of the Holy Land and its provinces.

Again we are told that all nations will be brought to the one Catholic Faith before the coming of Antichrist. This does not seem to be true, for this conversion will rather take place after the death of Antichrist when, seeing themselves to have been deceived by his falsehoods, men will return to the unity of the Faith. See Ezekiel (Ch. 39): "I have given thee to the wild beasts, to the birds, and to every fowl and to the beasts of the air to be devoured," speaking of the death of Antichrist—Gog—"and I will set my glory among all nations; and they shall see my judgment, that I have executed and my hand that I have laid upon them."

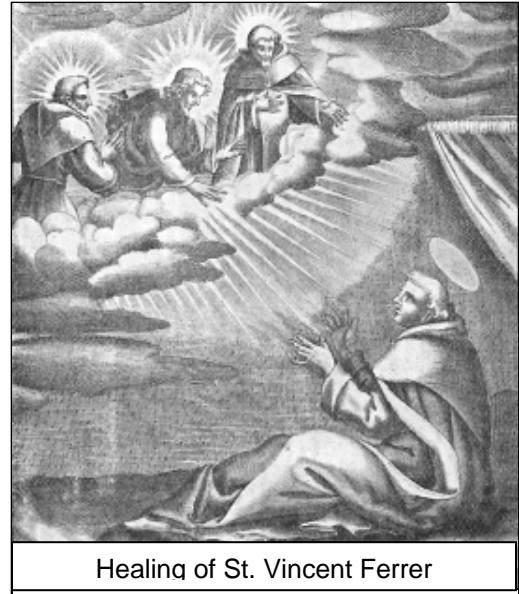
Another opinion affirms that the gospel of Christ must be preached throughout the world before the coming of Antichrist, according to the text of Saint Matthew (Ch. 24). "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world, for a testimony to the nations; and then shall the consummation come." This text is subject to diverse methods of exposition according to the manifold general preaching of the gospel throughout the world. First it was preached by the Apostles to every creature according to the precept of Christ in the last chapter of Saint Mark. This precept was fulfilled in the time of the Apostles as is shown in the Epistle to the Colossians (Ch. 1): "In the word of truth, the gospel which has come to you, as also it is in the whole world and bringeth forth fruit and growth." And towards the end of the same chapter : "The gospel which you have heard which is preached to all creation which is under heaven." And in Romans (Ch. 10): "Their sound is gone forth unto all the earth." Then came the consummation of the Jewish people and the destruction of Jerusalem under Titus and Vespasian. In the second place the gospel has been preached and is still being preached daily by the Dominicans and Franciscans. And after this, straightway will come the consummation and destruction of the world by Antichrist and his followers. The third preaching of the gospel throughout the world will take place after the death of Antichrist by certain faithful ones of each nation, who will have been wonderfully preserved by God for the conversion of the rest; and then will come the last consummation of the world.

The fourth conclusion I have drawn is that the time of Antichrist and the end of the world will take place in a short space of time, a mercifully short space of time and exceedingly quickly. This conclusion, although in substance it is found in the first homily of Saint Gregory, nevertheless, strictly and properly speaking, I prove it in many different ways.

First, from the revelations made to Saints Dominic and Francis, which I have spoken of previously. By this revelation it is made manifest *that the whole duration of the world rests on a*

*certain conditional prolongation obtained by the Virgin Mary in the hope of the correction and conversion of the world by the aforesaid Orders.* For Christ said to the Blessed Virgin: "Unless the world is corrected and converted by means of these Orders I will no longer spare it." Since, therefore, the conversion and correction of the world has not followed but rather the reverse, for greater crimes and wickedness abound, and, it must be regretfully admitted, these Religious Orders themselves, who have been given for the conversion and correction of the world, are in reality so moribund and relaxed that little religious observance is kept in them, the observant man must admit that this conclusion is amply proved.

In the second place the same conclusion is drawn from a certain other revelation (a most certain one to my mind), made just over fifteen years ago to a religious of the Dominican Order. This religious was very ill indeed and was praying lovingly to God for his recovery so, that he might again preach the word of God as he had been wont to do with great fervor and ardor. At last, while he was at prayer, these two saints appeared to him as in a dream, at the feet of Christ making great supplication. At length, after they had prayed thus for a. long while, Christ rose and, with one on either side, came down to this same religious lying on his bed. Then Christ, touching him caressingly with the finger of His most holy hand, gave him a most definite interior comprehension that, in imitation of these saints, he must go through the world preaching as the Apostles had done, and that He, Christ, would mercifully await this preaching for the conversion and correction of mankind, before the coming of Antichrist. At once, at the touch of Christ's fingers, the aforesaid religious rose up entirely cured of his sickness.



As he diligently followed the apostolic mission divinely committed to him, Providence, in testimony of the truth, gave this religious, not only numerous signs as he had given Moses, but also the authority of the divine Scriptures as he had given John the Baptist since, because of the difficulty of this mission and the slight weight of his own unaided testimony, he was greatly in need of help. Hence, of the three divine messengers sent to men by divine Providence under the name of angels, many persons believe him to be the first, of whom John has written: "And I saw another angel flying through the midst of heaven having the eternal gospel to preach to them that sit upon the earth and over every nation and tongue and tribe and people, saying with a loud voice: "Fear the Lord and give Him honor, because the hour of His judgment is come. And adore ye Him that made heaven and earth, the sea and the fountain and the waters. Let him who is able understand."

Since then the aforesaid religious has been traveling for thirteen years over the world, and is still journeying, preaching every day and in many labors, and though he is now an old man, more than sixty years old, he still holds this conclusion as most certain.

The same conclusion is also shown me by another revelation which I heard from a certain holy and devout man—as I consider him. When I was preaching in the province of Lombardy for the first time eleven years ago, there came to me from Tuscany a man sent, as he said, by certain most holy hermits of great austerity of life, to tell me that a divine revelation had been made to several of these men that the birth of Antichrist had already occurred, and must be announced to the world so that the faithful might prepare themselves for so dreadful a combat, and so they had sent the aforesaid hermit to me that I might tell the world. If then, as appears from these revelations, it is true that Antichrist had already completed nine years of his accursed life, then it follows that my conclusion is also true.

Another clear revelation which I heard while in Piedmont, told me by a Venetian merchant on whose word I can rely, confirms this conclusion. He was beyond the seas in a certain convent of the Friars Minor, and was attending Vespers on a certain feast day. At the end of Vespers, two little novices, according to their custom, singing the "*Benedicamus Domino*," were visibly rapt in ecstasy for a considerable period of time. At length they cried out together: "Today, at this hour, Antichrist, the destroyer of the world is born." This struck those present with fear and amazement, and among those who actually heard it was the Venetian who told me of the occurrence. When I questioned him and made enquiries about this event, I found that it happened nine years previously, and so this is further corroboration of what I have already said.

This same conclusion is further borne out by many other revelations made to many other devout and spiritual persons. For, traveling as I do, through many regions, provinces, kingdoms, cities and towns, many devout and spiritual persons come to me, referring with certitude to the coming of Antichrist and the end of the world, which they have received in many and vary diverse revelations, and in all of these there is the greatest concord.

Innumerable demons, forced to a confession of the truth have said the same thing. In many parts of the world, I have seen many persons possessed by the devil, who were brought to one of the priests of our company for exorcism. When the priest began to exorcise them they spoke openly of the time of Antichrist, in accordance with what has already been said, crying out loudly and terribly so that all the bystanders could hear them, and declaring that they were forced by Christ and against their own will and malice, to reveal to men the truth as given above, so that they might save themselves by true penance. These revelations have the effect of leading to contrition and penance the numerous Christians standing round. But when the demons are questioned, or even conjured to tell the truth of the birth place of Antichrist, they will not reveal it. . . .

From all that has been said above, I hold the opinion, which I think to be well founded, though not sufficiently proven for me to preach it, that nine years have already elapsed since the birth of Antichrist. But this I do preach with certitude and security, the Lord confirming my word by many signs, that in an exceedingly short time will come the reign of Antichrist and the end of the world.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, foreknowing that this doctrine will be unacceptable to carnal persons and the lovers of this world, said in the Gospel of Saint Luke (Ch. 17): "And it came to pass in the days of Noah, so shall it also be in the days of the Son of Man. They did eat and drink and

they married wives and were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all." The same thing happened in the days of Lot; they ate and drank, they bought and sold, they planted and built. On the day that Lot left Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and all were destroyed. This will happen on the day when the Son of Man shall be revealed. On that day, whoever is on the roof and his vessels in the house must not come down to take them, and he who is in the field must not return to his house. Remember Lot's wife!

Again in the First Epistle to the Thessalonians (Ch. 5 ) we read: "And the times and moments, brethren, you need not that we should write to you; for you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night. For when they shall say peace and security; then shall destruction come upon them, as the pains of her who is with child. And they shall not flee."

This, most Holy Father, is what I am preaching concerning the time of Antichrist and the end of the world, subject to the correction and determination of Your Holiness, whom may the Most High preserve.

July 7th, 1412.