

A440 Sabato ante Reminiscere Sermo i

**St. Vincent Ferrer - Sermon for the Second Sunday of Lent
The Transfiguration – Matthew 17:1-9**

Gospel: Mt 17:1-9 Douay Trans.

1 And after six days Jesus taketh unto him Peter and James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into a high mountain apart: 2 And he was transfigured before them. And his face did shine as the sun: and his garments became white as snow. 3 And behold there appeared to them Moses and Elias talking with him. 4 And Peter answering, said to Jesus: Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, **let us make here three tabernacles**, one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. 5 And as he was yet speaking, behold a bright cloud overshadowed them. And lo, a voice out of the cloud, saying: This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: hear ye him. 6 And the disciples hearing, fell upon their face, and were very much afraid. 7 And Jesus came and touched them: and said to them, Arise, and fear not. 8 And they lifting up their eyes saw no one but only Jesus. 9 And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying: Tell the vision to no man, till the Son of man be risen from the dead.

"Let us make here three tents," (Mt 17:4). We continue our reading in today's gospel. By way of introducing these words and the matter to be preached about, it must be known that in sacred scripture the devout hearing and listening to the gospel teaching are called tabernacles [or tents]. For if we analyze well the usefulness of tents, rightly they are compared to gospel teaching. For when tents or tabernacles, are pitched by soldiers, they are done for three reasons:

1. The first reason is because of the heat of the sun, to keep cool,
2. The second, against the gusting of the wind, for protection,
3. Third, for shelter against the rain.

All these benefits gospel teaching gives to those who listen carefully, and this against a threefold defect.

1. First, gospel teaching cools and preserves a man against the stimulation and ardor of the flesh, which moves many and stimulates them into sins of lust. Some are tempted to avarice, others into other sins. These teachings, therefore, give cool shelter against the ardor of the flesh.
2. Second, in this world there are many winds and storms and temptations of demons, but not inside the tent, i.e. of prayer and contemplation. For prayer and contemplation keep out the temptations of the devil.
3. Third, there are great rains and floods, and these are the world, which offers many occasions for sinning. But enter the tent of gospel teaching and you will find there a remedy. And so Isaiah says of gospel teaching, "Over all the glory shall be a protection. And there shall be a tabernacle for a shade in the daytime from the heat, and for a security and covert from the whirlwind, and from rain." (Isa 4:5-6). So, prayer or contemplation gives cooling in the day against the ardor of the flesh. See, the first usefulness. And it gives security against the force of the wind, and this is its second strength or utility. And it provides shelter from the rains, and so the third benefit.

And so, by both reason and authority, these teachings appear like a tent, and so I intend to preach on three teachings, which are the three tents. "Let us make here three tents," which was our theme. Our sermon, therefore, shall contemplate this glorious transfiguration in three ways, a triple contemplation.

First because this transfiguration was gloriously celebrated,

Second because this transfiguration was calmly received,

Third because this transfiguration was piously kept hidden.

THE FIRST TENT – GLORIOUSLY CELEBRATED

My good people, let us place ourselves in these three tents, or in one of them. I say first that it was gloriously celebrated, because in the gospel it is said, " ...Jesus takes with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and brings them up to a high mountain apart: And he was transfigured before them. And his face shone like the sun: and his garments became white as snow. And behold there appeared to them Moses and Elias talking with him," (Mt 17:1-3). And here I wish to pitch the first tent for our Lord.

Jesus chose three to follow him, whom he led to the top of the mountain, to show them the secret. When he prayed, he was transfigured, not that his figure which he already had was changed, but that it shone like the sun – not like the sun shines, but incomparably greater than the sun. But in the gospel it is said "like the sun," because in the world nothing is found that is brighter, and not only in his face and hands, but also his clothes were like snow, although incomparably more so.

And two holy men from the past appeared there, i.e. Moses and Elias. You should understand [it was] the soul of Moses, for he was dead and his soul was in the limbo of the holy patriarchs, but Elias was not dead, rather he was alive, still living in a terrestrial paradise. He it was who was to preach at the time of the antichrist and against that very antichrist who would kill him, in martyrdom. And these three apostles, although they never had seen them, instantly recognized them, because of their splendor, and they saw them speaking with Jesus. Neither Mark nor Matthew report what they talked about, but St. Luke says that they were speaking with each other about the "excess of the passion" of Christ to take place in Jerusalem in those days. ["And they spoke of his decease that he should accomplish in Jerusalem." (Lk 9: 30f)]

Now, good people, let us examine this in a practical way. These two, standing with Jesus, Moses and Elias, adored Jesus, knowing Jesus to be God and man, and they wondered much why he would permit himself to be chained and bound by the Jews, even if for sinners, since he could have accomplished his task by a single word. Filled with admiration, since he it was who gave glory to the angels and to all the others, they were saying, "O God, how great is this charity." Each of them discussed every aspect of his passion and detailed its excesses. The passion is said to be "excessive" because of the extremes of sufferings and love which he has shown to us, for, God, indeed is rich in mercy and because of this exceeding charity and mercy he has loved us, according to what is said in Ephesians, 2, "But God, (who is rich in mercy,) for his exceeding charity wherewith he loved us," (Eph 2:4). See how gloriously this

transfiguration is celebrated. Behold, the first tent. Here we rest against the attack and the temptation of the devil. And this is the literal sense.

And now we enter [its] secrets. First we ask why Christ wished to be transfigured. Second, about the people he wished to invite.

My answer to the first is so that he might reveal his intrinsic glory and secrets. Just as it is said by the teachers. When Christ assumed humanity, let us see why he assumed it. I say for two reasons. For his soul, as it was created in the womb of the virgin Mary, immediately had such glory as he has now in heaven, and this because of his divinity. It was a spiritual substance. Nevertheless it was hidden in the body. And so we say, "...and we saw his glory, the glory as it were of the only begotten of the Father," (Jn 1:14). It assumes a body, not glorious, but vulnerable and mortal, like us, and even more vulnerable than ours, and this for our sake. But it was otherwise for the soul. So because of his weakness he could be assimilated to his brothers in all things, as we read in Hebrews, "Wherefore he had to be made like unto his brethren in all things, that he might become merciful," (Heb 2:17). In such a body was the glorious soul, but it was not seen by people. By which it is believed that, just like the body, so too the soul would be vulnerable. Christ wished to show that this was not so. For this reason he wished to show his glory which poured out of his body and overflowed.

And listen to this parable. There is a man dressed in rags, yet he is extremely rich. People would consider him to be poor. He might gather all his friends and his family and show them his wealth, and the people followed him saying, that, although he is badly dressed, he is rich, we will follow him. So the common saying is, "Money makes for good friends." So Christ wished to be transfigured. For already he had promised when he said, "There are some of them that stand here, that shall not taste death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom," (Mt 16:28). And he was speaking of those whom he now took with himself.

Morally, for your sake. Christ first had glory and yet his body was capable of suffering. So for the souls of the saints who pass from this life to the next. First their souls are in glory, and yet their bodies remain in corruption. Nevertheless our body shall be transfigured, on the day of the resurrection, and the glorified soul will take up its body and overflow into the body. And that glorified body is called bright, and on the day of judgment it shall be brighter than the sun. And so it is said: "Then shall the just shine as the sun, in the kingdom of their Father," (Mt 13:43).

To the second question, why did he take just three apostles and not more, and why not all the saints, but just these two from the Old Testament – he called five, the holy teachers say that from the testimony of two or three every word stands, if you ask about the number. But if you ask about the people, I say that these Apostles were Christ's friends. For by divine promise St. Peter was already constituted pope, he was invited so that he might know even more. Secondly he called James the Greater, because he was the first to receive martyrdom, as we read in the Acts, 12: "And he killed James, the brother of John, with the sword," (Acts 12:2). Third, he called John, because he was a virgin chosen by God, and more beloved than the others, therefore he deserved to be honored more by the Lord.

I say that he wished to call the dead and the living to the transfiguration, since he is seen to be judge of the living and the dead. No so for the lords of this age, because they do not judge the dead. Therefore it is said: "And fear ye not them that kill the body, and are not able to kill the soul," (Matt. 10:28). And Acts 10: "...that it is he who was appointed by God, to be judge of the living and of the dead," (Acts 10:42).

But why more Elias than Enoch, since he too was still alive? The question is unresolved. And why the dead Moses rather than the other holy patriarchs? Because there are many dead, especially since Abraham was the principal one. And so it is said, "in the bosom of Abraham," (cf. Lk 16:23). I say that I prefer one side of the various opinions about this, that which holds that only two of the holy patriarchs ever fasted for forty days: Moses, in Exodus 34, "And [Moses] was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights: he neither ate bread nor drank water," (Ex 34:28). And Elias: "And [he arose, and] ate, and drank, and walked in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights, unto the mount of God, Horeb, "3Kgs 19:8). Therefore because they fasted forty days, so they merited to be present at the transfiguration, in which it is clear how much this sacred fast of Lent is pleasing to God.

So we should fast for the forty days of Lent so on Easter Day we shall be at the transfiguration, namely by receiving communion, and we shall say with the Apostle [Paul], "But we all beholding the glory of the Lord with open face, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord," (2Cor 3:18).

Note here how Christ, Moses and Elias fasted for forty days, and it says that Christ fasted praying. Luke 6: "That he went out into a mountain to pray, and he passed the whole night in the prayer of God." (Lk 6:12). Moses fasted for forty days by listening, (cf. Ex 34,) where it is said that he stayed on the mountain with God. Elias fasted by journeying or walking, (cf. above. 3Kgs 19). So we, at the example of Christ, should devote ourselves to praying. "Be ye therefore followers of God, as most dear children," (Eph 5:1), by praying every prayer and observance. Secondly, following the example of Moses, we should try to attend masses, and sermons and so we will be like Moses. Third, at the example of Elias, we should try to walk, to journey, in pilgrimage, because when you fast by praying like Christ and listen like Moses, you ought to fast like Elias traveling, that is by visiting churches, because there are many indulgences in such. Later, go to vespers, so that finally, on Easter, you shall be worthy to have the glory of paradise.

You ought in these times to set aside your courtrooms, your lawsuits, and your objections and allegations, by rather saying prayers, by saying the Our Father, the Hail Mary, etc. and after hearing a sermon and praying, you should journey forth, as I told you, that you might acquire some riches for your soul. And remember what Christ said: "Murmur not among yourselves," (Jn 6:43). In olden days, during this time [of Lent] court was not open nor was it held, but it is no longer such. And this about the first tent.

SECOND TENT – QUIETLY RECEIVED

The second point is that this transfiguration was quietly received by the Apostles, Moses and Elias. That is clear because St. Peter said, "Lord, it is good for us to be here: if you wish, let us pitch three tents here," (Mt 17:4). It was therefore quietly received, because when Christ so stood, transfigured, and the onlookers were perceiving the glory of paradise, Peter said, "It is good for us to be here," (v. 4), because he tasted the tabernacle (tent) of paradise, because he said, "Let us pitch three tents here," as if believing that John would stay with Moses, James with Elias, and that he would be with Christ. St. Luke says about him, "not knowing what he said," (Lk 9:33).

Then the shining cloud came and overshadowed them. About this see, for although a cloud is bright of itself, nevertheless because of an impediment it is seen like a shadow. And so to those standing there, a voice comes from heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son," (v. 5). And everyone fell on their face.

And Jesus came to the apostles lying there and he raised them up. Once on their feet they saw that Moses and Elias had already departed; Moses to the place of the holy patriarchs, Elias to the earthly paradise.

You can imagine that when the soul of Moses came to its place, he was questioned saying, "Where did you go and what did you see?" He replied, "I have seen the redeemer of the world, who is already many years old. Soon he shall come to free us." O, what a great joy came over them. The same can be imagined about Elias, when his companion Enoch saw him, and he said to him, "O companion, where did you go? Where were you? Tell me some news. Have you seen the Savior?" "Certainly," he replied, "I have seen the Savior. For I was carried by St. Michael and I clearly saw the Lord transfigured." He told him everything. Consider the sorrow of the other saying, "O why did I not go? O why was it not I?" Then he could have replied, "Because you have not fasted." So, about Moses someone might think what questions there had been. So it was received quietly.

But I ask what was the reason why Christ did not reply to the proposal of Peter saying, "Let us make here three tabernacles." According to the Gloss, he did not reply verbally, because it was not a rational request. Well enough! But I say that Jesus replied secretly. For Peter was seeking his glory on that mountain and Christ showed that it could not happen for five reasons:

1. The first is because of the arrival of the cloud. See, in deed, he replied.
2. Second because of the voice of the Father.
3. Third because they had fallen down.
4. Fourth because Christ helped them to rise up.
5. Fifth because they saw no one but Christ.

And so Christ wanted first to show Peter the five [events], before he was to come and to have glory. And first the cloud came and this signifies penance, and so: "Do penance, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," (Matt. 4:17). So first penance must be done.

Second the voice of the Father sounded, "This is my beloved Son, ...hear ye him," (v. 5). It signifies obedience. So it is said, "But if the wicked do penance for all his sins which he hath

committed, and keep all my commandments, and do judgment, and justice, living he shall live," (Ezek. 18:21).

Third, fear and humiliation are required, because they fell down. For every saint fears death. For according to the Philosopher (Aristotle), "Death is the most terrible of all things," (Aristotle, Nichomachean Ethics 3.6 [1115a27]).

Fourth, Christ has to come and this on the day of judgment, when, by divine power they shall be raised from death, because Christ made them rise up at his transfiguration when he said to them, "Arise, and fear not." (v. 7), because sinners fear his appearance. But it is said to the just, "Do not fear, arise."

Fifth "they lifting up their eyes saw no one but only Jesus," (v. 8), as is understood that only The divine essence and no creature is the object of glory, or of eternal life, speaking of essential or principal glory, about which St. Thomas, [\[Summa theologiae\] I, q. 12, a. 8 in the response to the 4th objection](#). And to this vision no creature through its own natural powers can come, as the same St. Thomas beautifully proves in the same question, namely [q. 12, a. 4](#). And so it is said in Romans 6: "But the grace of God, life everlasting, in Christ Jesus," (Rom. 6:23).

So that shall be the tent. Therefore he has to do all these things after, and in this way Christ responded by action (facto). And so in the Psalm, "Judge me O God," it is said, "Send forth your light and your truth: they have conducted me, and brought me unto your holy hill," (Ps 42:3), namely to Mount Thabor. Thus, the second point, namely how the transfiguration was calmly received.

THIRD TENT - DEVOUTLY HIDDEN

The third part follows, in which that transfiguration was devoutly hidden. For the text says: "And as they came down from the mountain, etc.," Jesus said to them, "Tell the vision to no man, till the Son of man be risen from the dead," (v. 9).

But why did he wish that the aforesaid transfiguration be kept hidden? Response: according to the teachers, the reason of his hiding was the piety of Christ, lest the Apostles and disciples hearing of such glory of Christ, if the transfiguration was revealed to them, and later having seen the ignominy of the passion of Christ, would have been more scandalized and would have sinned more by losing faith. Thus these three Apostles, "held their peace, and told no man in those days any of these things which they had seen," (Lk 9:36).

I believe, however, that St. John, with the permission of Christ, told the Virgin Mary of the glory of the transfiguration of Christ, and so, it seems, that Christ wished more for our salvation, than for his glory, when he says, "But I seek not my own glory: there is one that seeks and judges," (Jn 8:50). And so it was devoutly hidden, therefore now you have three tents. Here you rest, especially in these times [of Lent].