

**St. Vincent Ferrer -- Sermon -- The Cure of the Man Born Blind
John 9: 1-38**

"And falling down, he adored him," (Jn 9:38). Our sermon shall be from the holy gospel today which contains a great and beautiful miracle which Christ performed, the cure [Vincent prefers the word, enlightenment] of the man born blind. But first, let us salute the Virgin Mary, etc. [Here he has everyone recite the Hail Mary.]

The complete gospel consists of three points,

The first is the miraculous work (*operatio miraculosa*),

The second is malicious attack (*impugnatio malitiosa*),

The third is gracious approval (*approbitio gratiosa*).

And of this third, when the blind man, illuminated by Christ, approves the miracle by adoring Christ, [John] the Theologian says, "And falling down, he adored him," (Jn 9:38). Thus the gracious approval.

MIRACULOUS DEED

The first shown in the holy gospel is the miraculous deed, about which the Gospel, "And Jesus passing by," i.e. exiting the temple, "saw a man, who was blind from birth," (v.1), who was standing there begging, and he whom Christ saw was familiar to all. The Gloss on Chrysostom, i.e. he looked on him attentively. Because of this attentive look, the Apostles found a reason for interrogating Christ saying, "Rabbi, who has sinned, this man, or his parents, that he should be born blind?" (v. 2). They didn't ask whether this punishment had come from sin, because they presumed this, but they were asking through which sin. It seems that the Apostles were of the same opinion as the friends of Job, who were saying that all evil and illness come upon man from sins. Job was holding to the contrary: "I have not sinned, and my eye abides in bitterness," (Job 17:2).

Christ wishing to disabuse the Apostles of this opinion replied, saying, "Neither has this man sinned, nor his parents; but that the works of God should be made manifest in him," (v. 3). Note that Christ doesn't deny simply that children suffer something from the sins of the parents, especially in body which they have from their parents. Blessed Jerome even says that the secret sins of parents, which they commit behind closed doors, are often manifested in punishments of the children. Exodus 20: "I am the Lord your God, mighty, jealous, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation," (Ex 20:5). And Isaiah: "Prepare his children for slaughter, for the iniquity of their fathers," (Isa 14:21). Ezekiel: "The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father," (Ezek 18:20), and this with respect to the soul. But the penalties, with respect to the body, because God never punishes the soul of a child directly just because of the sin of the father. Thus he says in the same place, "Behold all souls are mine: as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sins, the same shall die," (Ezek 18:4). But not so for this man; not from the sins of the parents, nor from his own was he born blind, "but that the works of God should be manifested in him," (v. 3). Note, [he says] "works" in the plural. For when an innocent infant suffers, four works of God are manifested.

First is manifested a work of justice. The Doctors of theology say that the first parents had been formed in original justice, and although the body is naturally vulnerable, nevertheless God had given that grace to Adam, because as long as he was obedient to God and the body also was obedient to the soul and that the body did not suffer some accident. But because Adam was disobedient to God, for this the body lost grace and remains in its misery and vulnerability. Whenever therefore you should see an infant suffering some evil, divine justice is manifested there, because on account of the sin of Adam bodies suffer justly. So David says, "And his justice unto children's children," (Ps 102:17). So in this blind man there was a defect of some principle of nature so that the work of divine justice would be manifested in him.

Second, in a suffering infant the work of divine mercy is made manifest, because the infant avoids sin. To the extent that this blind man lacks vision, many sins are avoided which are committed by the eyes. He was humble and merited from his patience. Thus Habakkuk 3: "When you are angry, you will remember mercy," (Hab 3:2).

Third, is manifested the work of penance, because when the sinner sees that he who is innocent is suffering, he says to himself, "O wretched one, what shall become of me?"

Fourth, is manifested the work of the grace of God, when God decided to cure him miraculously. So Christ cured this blind man miraculously. He says, "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day," (v. 4). Here Christ calls his presence the "sun," which makes the day bright, and his absence through bodily death he calls "night." The Gloss says, "I must work," namely, miraculously, his "works, of him who sent me," namely the Father, "while it is day," i.e. as long as I am of the Father. "The night comes," namely of death and of my passion, when no one can work, miraculously. After his death through the prayers of the holy Apostles, Christ would work miracles. So David, "Give glory to the Lord," of lords, "for his mercy endures for ever," (Ps 105:1).

Note how Christ when curing the blind man used seven ceremonies. First he looked at him attentively. Second was the questioning of the Apostles, Third Christ spat on the earth. Fourth he made mud from the spittle. Fifth he rubbed it over his eyes. Sixth he sent him to the pool of Siloe. Seventh was the washing in that pool. Why did he want to keep so many ceremonies and details, when he could have enlightened him by a simple command, as we read regarding another blind man, in Luke 18, when Christ said, "What do you wish that I do to you?" The blind man said, "Lord, that I may see. And Jesus said to him: Receive your sight, etc.," (Lk 18:41f), and immediately he could see. Why, therefore in this case did he use so many ceremonies?

I respond, that Christ wished to cure [literally, illuminate] this blind man in this way so that he might give an example to every blind sinner how he can be enlightened. Note how everyone in the state of mortal sin is blind, because he does not see the danger of suddenly plummeting into the pit of hell. Now he is just falling from sin into sin. So, the Prophet says about sinners, "And they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the Lord," (Zeph 1:17). Thus to cure him, it was necessary for Christ to follow the above ceremonies in bringing light to this blind man.

First, Jesus sees, i.e. looked at him attentively. See here the recognition of sins which comes from the glance of Christ, as was made clear to Peter, who on the night of the passion denied Christ three times. He did not acknowledge his sin until Christ looked at him, Luke 22: "And the Lord turning looked on Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, as he had said: Before the cock crows, you shall deny me three times. And Peter going out, wept bitterly," (Lk 22:61). See how the look of Christ is necessary for the recognition of sins. So David said, "Look upon me, and have mercy on me; for I am unique and poor," (Ps 24:16). Note "unique," i.e. alone, from whom God withdraws. Before his sin God was with him.

The second circumstance was the questioning of the Apostles, "Rabbi, etc.," (v. 1), in which is shown contrition for sins, which is nothing other than the questioning of the heart or a debate, for which reason the sinner, out of contrition, says to himself, "O wretch, what have you done? You have committed so many sins, what will happen to my soul? I have lost so many good things," etc. Note here the similarity with that merchant who on market day buys a straw basket as a gold one, who buys fish eyes for pearls, for which he paid everything that he had. He shows his purchase to his friends, who asked how he could be so duped, and that it was worthless. He did not despair because he counted on his rich father, but he blamed himself saying, "O miserable one, why did I not seek some advice. How stupid it was to make my purchase." So there are also today many stupid buyers in the world, who believed that they had bought a golden urn, namely honors, dignities, which nevertheless is worthless. Likewise they believe carnal delights to be pearls. But when they are enlightened by God and see themselves deceived, then they put their hope in Christ, like a rich father. It is clear therefore how contrition is only an indicting questioning of oneself.

Thus Job, 14, in the person of a sinner says, "How many are my iniquities and sins? make me know my crimes and offences," (Job 13:23). Where he points out four differences between sins. First is "iniquities," i.e. not equals, which are the sins which happen against the neighbor, and nevertheless God wishes that we be equal in love. Second is where, "and sins," which are about deeds which happen against our own body, like lust, gluttony, laziness. Thus sins are called beastly. Third where, "crimes," which happen directly against God, like blasphemy. Fourth where, "and offenses," which are about deeds which happen against the soul, like pride, avarice, anger and envy. Therefore, "offenses," as if abandoned, because by these defects the miserable soul is forsaken. See why he says, "How many are my iniquities and sins? make me know my crimes and offences," (Job 13:23).

The third circumstance why Christ spat on the ground. Behold here oral confession which is nothing but to vomit sins and to purge of sins the stomach of the soul. And in this it is shown the manner of confessing by which the sinner ought to go, on bended knees before the confessor, and there to spit out and vomit those uncleannesses of stinking sins by giving himself the power to expel sins. See how Christ "spat on the ground," (v. 6). Say against those who vomit on the altar, who confess on foot, where the confessor since he be the judge ought to sit. Some, however, confess, neither on the ground, nor on the altar, but looking the confessor face to face, which is bad for two reason. First because of the shame of the sinner. Second because of the danger to the confessors, looking on the face of a beautiful woman, etc. Therefore it is said to sinners, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all iniquity," (1 Jn 1:9).

The fourth, he makes "clay of the spittle," (v. 6). Behold here the imposition of a penance, because the prudent confessor ought to mix the saliva of the sinner with the earth, i.e. to recognize the gravity of the sins, so that, according to the condition and quality of the person, and the quantity of sins, he would know how to proportion the penance to what the sinner is able to do. Deuteronomy 25: "According to the measure of the sin shall the measure also of the stripes be," (Deut 25:2) The same is said of sinners, "As much as she has glorified herself, and lived in delicacies, so much torment and sorrow give to her," (Rev 18:7).

Fifth, he anoints his eyes. He does not say punished, but anointed, namely in two senses, in which is shown a gentle admonition, which the confessor ought to give, namely anointing the eyes of the soul of the sinner, inducing him to penance, because it is better do penance here, than in the next world. Therefore the confessor ought to say to the sinner, "Whatsoever your hand is able to do, do it earnestly: for neither work, nor reason, nor wisdom, nor knowledge shall be in hell, where you are hurrying," (Eccl 9:10).

The sixth is, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloe," (v. 7). See here the actual continuation of the appointed penance, namely from day to day, from week to week, etc. unless it is changed for him by another confessor, otherwise unless the penance is accepted, the sinner is damned. Thus is said, "Go to the side of the holy age, with them that live and give praise to God. Tarry not in the error of the ungodly, give glory before death. Praise perishes from the dead as nothing. Give thanks while you are living, while you are alive and in health you shall give thanks, and shall praise God, and shall glory in his mercies," (Sir17:25-27). "The holy age," i.e. the penitential parts of the damned world are sins.

The seventh ceremony is, "He went..and washed, and he came seeing," (v. 7). Siloe is interpreted "sent". See here eucharistic communion. After the sinner completed the six aforesaid works, he ought to go to the pool of Siloam, i.e. to the church of Christ who is "sent" by the Father, therefore, Mass is said by the sent Christ, in which the soul is washed, and bathed contemplating the depth of the sacrament. In this way the blind sinner is enlightened according to that in 1 Kings 14, "that my eyes are enlightened, because I tasted a little of this honey," (1 Kings 14:29), namely of the sweetest body of Christ.

MALICIOUS ATTACKS

The second point of the gospel is about a malicious attack. The Jews held four attacks or examinations about the cure of the blind man. The first was of the bystanders, the second, of the Pharisees, the third of the parents, and the fourth was by the high court [lit.: princes].

-- As to the first, it must be noted that after the bystanders saw him who had been blind coming without a guide, and without a staff, and that he was seeing clearly, they said to each other, "Is not this the one who sat and begged? Some said: This is he. But others said: No, but he looks like him. But he himself said: I am he," (vv. 8-9).

-- As for the second, which was of the Pharisees, who having heard about it, asked him how it was that he could see. He told them everything, saying, "That man called Jesus made clay," out of spittle, "and anointed my eyes, and said to me: Go to the pool of Siloe, and wash. And I went,

I washed, and I see," (v. 11). So they led him to the Pharisees. "It was the sabbath." To them he gave the same story. Then the Pharisees said of Christ, " This man is not of God, who keeps not the sabbath. But others said: How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles? And there was a division among them," (v. 16).

-- The third examination was of the parents to whom the Pharisees said, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind?" How then does he now see? His parents answered them, and said: "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind: But how he now sees, we know not; or who has opened his eyes, we know not: ask himself: he is of age, let him speak for himself. These things his parents said, because they feared the Jews," (vv. 19-22), because the parents fearing the sentence of excommunication which the Jews imposed, had not dared to say who enlightened him, and so the sign was complete which Isaiah had promised, "God himself will come and ... then shall the eyes of the blind be opened," (Isa 35:4f).

-- The fourth dispute was with the high court [lit.: princes of the law], to which the healed blind man had been led. They said to him, "Give glory to God," that is, you should not say that this man cured you, because he is a sinner," (v. 24). He replied, " If he be a sinner, I know not: one thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see," (v. 25). They then said, " What did he do to you?" tell us, etc. "Will you also become his disciples? They reviled him therefore, and said: You be his disciple; but we are the disciples of Moses. We know that God spoke to Moses: but as for this man, we know not from whence he is," (vv. 27-29). He said to them, "Why, herein is a wonderful thing, that you know not from whence he is, and he has opened my eyes. Now we know that God does not hear sinners: but if a man be a server of God, and does his will, him he hears." (v. 30f) They replied, "You were wholly born in sins, and you dare to teach us? And they cast him out," (v. 34), excommunicating him. This cured blind man was a holy man called Saint Cedonius [Celidonius, Sedonius], who with Mary Magdalen, Martha and Lazarus came to the province of Marseilles, etc.

Morally. This blind man, cured by Christ signifies the sinner enlightened by Christ, by returning him through penance from the darkness of sins to the brightness and the light of grace. He is challenged and examined by four.

-- First by the neighbors. Say when a religious or priest, man or woman is converted to God, immediately the bystanders and others challenge him jokingly, deriding, so that the saying of David about his is fulfilled, "We are become a reproach to our neighbors," (Ps 78:3). There are many who at this time do not dare to begin a good life. Christ, comforting, says to such, " Blessed shall you be when men shall hate you," (Lk. 6:22).

-- Second he is challenged by the Pharisees, i.e. by carnal inclinations which separate us from God. Galatians 5: "For the flesh lusts against the spirit," (Gal 5:17), or by the Pharisees, i.e. by the demons who are alienated from God, from paradise, and from us, who challenge us tempting, first our faith, next with avarice, and lust etc., to withdraw a person from a good life begun. The sinner ought to keep himself strong and happily endure such temptations. James 1: " My brethren, count it all joy, when you shall fall into diverse temptations; knowing that the trying of your faith works patience, and let patience be a perfect work; that you may be perfect and entire, failing in nothing," (Jas 1:2-4). Gregory: "He fails to tempt those whom he perceives possess

themselves with a undisputed right. Augustine: "Don't judge yourself to live without temptation, for if you avoid one, expect another, if however you should say that you do not have a temptation, then you shall be tempted even stronger."

-- The third temptation, from the parents, i.e. from sickness, pain etc. which we have from our parents, namely Adam and Eve, because when a person is not overcome by derision and the temptations of demons, afterwards, come sicknesses, pains and the such by which they are compelled to go to God, so David, "Their infirmities were multiplied: afterwards they made haste," (Ps 15:4), i. e. to go to God. So Gregory: "Evils which press us now, drive us to go to God." 2 Cor 12: " Gladly therefore will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may dwell in me," (2 Cor 12:9).

-- The fourth assault is from the princes of the law, i.e. from the temporal lords who want to have temporal goods of devout people. The first assault touches upon fame, by crying hypocrite, etc. the second touches the soul, the third the body, the fourth temporal goods, because when a person wishes to live well and serve God, immediately come litigious questions, quarrels against the goods until it is driven away by them. Thus patience is necessary. 2 Tim 3: " And all who will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution," (2 Tim 3:12). Or say that the fourth confrontation is from the princes, that is the demons who tempt, etc., as above. Thus the Apostle, Eph last: "Finally, brethren, be strengthened in the Lord, and in the might of his power. Put on the armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the deceits of the devil. For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood; but against principalities and powers," (Eph 6:10).

GRACIOUS APPROVAL

The third point is the gracious approval of the miracle, from which comes the theme, "And falling down, he adored him." (v. 38). After the blind man now cured was thrown out by the Jews and excommunicated, no one dared to receive him in their homes, not even his parents, nor even to speak with him, nor to give him a light, or anything. He said to himself, "O miserable wretch, if we can only find that holy prophet Jesus who cured me, at least I would have his company." Christ however knowing his tribulation and his good desire came to him on the street saying, "Do you believe in the Son of God? He answered, and said: Who is he, Lord, that I may believe in him? And Jesus said to him: You have both seen him; and it is he who is talking with you. And he said: I believe, Lord. And falling down, he adored him, (vv. 35-38). Christ welcomed him into his company. He can say with David, "For my father and my mother have left me: but the Lord has taken me up," (Ps 26:10).

Morally. We have here a teaching, because just as this one did not hesitate to leave those unfaithful associates, to be in the company of Christ, so neither should you. Note this against merchants, who keep company with infidels, against whom holy Scripture says, "Bear not the yoke," i.e. the company, "with unbelievers," (2 Cor 6:14). The question which the Muslims make, because they hold and possess the Holy Land, therefore they should not be stamped out etc. Response. The truth is that God wishes that this land rather be in the possession of the Muslims than the Christians. Reason, for the greater confusion of the Muslims and the excusing of the Christians.

The Muslims, of old, were at one time Christians who were deceived by Sergius and Mohammed, who held that Christ was not God. When the Christians out of devotion went there, they showed the Christians the place in which Christ gave sight to the blind man and raised the dead etc., which miracles could not have happened, unless by God alone. Also, they say that they should not be baptized in the name of the Trinity; nevertheless they show there the place where Christ was baptized and the whole Trinity was revealed, which they deny. Also, they do not believe in the sacrament of the altar, all the while showing where Christ held the [Last] Supper and instituted that sacrament. Also they do not believe that Christ suffered, died or was buried, yet they show Christians the place of the passion, death, and the holy tomb, to their own confusion, because they show what they do not believe. Thus David says, in the person of the Christian people, "Show me a token for good: that they who hate me may see, and be confounded," etc., (Ps 85:17).

Second, the Muslims hold that land for the excusing of Christians, for no one is able to excuse himself of sins. Eccl 7: " For there is no just man upon earth, that does good, and sins not," (Eccl 7:21). Christ did not wish that Christians should commit sins and wicked deeds in that Holy Land. If it is asked, Why should he permit that the Muslims would commit sins there? I reply, because it is not as displeasing to him, as Christians. Just like the king who permits his dogs to do their uncleanness in his room, which he would not tolerate with his children or soldiers. So that Holy Land is the chamber of God, where it is permitted that his dogs make their uncleannesses of sin, but it is not permitted to his children, namely the Christians. Hence, that whole homeland was once the Christians', but because they committed sins there, God said, "Outside, outside!" So Christ said, Lk 21: "...and Jerusalem shall be trodden down by the Gentiles," (Lk 21:24).

Third, the Muslims hold that land for the consolation of Christians, because through this it is realized that that land is not the final goal of Christians, as it was of the Jews. But the heavenly homeland is the final goal of Christians, gained for us by the merit of the passion of Christ. Thus the Apostle, in Hebrews, last chapter: " For we have not here a lasting city, but we seek one that is to come," (Heb 13:14). To which Jesus leads us, etc.

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John 9: 1-38 Douay trans.

1 And Jesus passing by, saw a man, who was blind from his birth: 2 And his disciples asked him: Rabbi, who hath sinned, this man, or his parents, that he should be born blind? 3 Jesus answered: Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents; but that the works of God should be made manifest in him. 4 I must work the works of him that sent me, whilst it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work. 5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world. 6 When he had said these things, he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and spread the clay on his eyes, 7 And said to him: Go, wash in the pool of Siloe, which is interpreted, Sent. He went therefore, and washed, and he came seeing. 8 The neighbours therefore, and they who had seen him before that he was a beggar, said: Is not this he that sat and begged? Some said: This is he. 9 But others said: No, but he is like him. But he said: I am he. 10 They said therefore to him: How were thy eyes opened? 11 He answered: That man that is called Jesus made clay, and anointed my eyes, and said to me: Go to the pool of Siloe, and wash. And I went, I washed, and I see. 12 And they said to him: Where is he? He saith: I know not. 13 They bring him that had been blind to the Pharisees. 14 Now it was the sabbath, when Jesus made the clay, and opened his eyes. 15 Again therefore the Pharisees asked him, how he had received his sight. But he said to them: He put clay upon my eyes, and I washed, and I see. 16 Some therefore of the Pharisees said: This man is not of God, who keepeth not the sabbath. But others said: How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles? And there was a division among them. 17 They say therefore to the blind man again: What sayest thou of him that hath opened they eyes? And he said: He is a prophet. 18 The Jews then did not believe concerning him, that he had been blind, and had received his sight, until they called the parents of him that had received his sight, 19 And asked them, saying: Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then doth he

now see? 20 His parents answered them, and said: We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind: 21 But how he now seeth, we know not; or who hath opened his eyes, we know not: ask himself: he is of age, let him speak for himself. 22 These things his parents said, because they feared the Jews: for the Jews had already agreed among themselves, that if any man should confess him to be Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue. 23 Therefore did his parents say: He is of age, ask himself. 24 They therefore called the man again that had been blind, and said to him: Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner. 25 He said therefore to them: If he be a sinner, I know not: one thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see. 26 They said then to him: What did he to thee? How did he open thy eyes? 27 He answered them: I have told you already, and you have heard: why would you hear it again? will you also become his disciples? 28 They reviled him therefore, and said: Be thou his disciple; but we are the disciples of Moses. 29 We know that God spoke to Moses: but as to this man, we know not from whence he is. 30 The man answered, and said to them: Why, herein is a wonderful thing, that you know not from whence he is, and he hath opened my eyes. 31 Now we know that God doth not hear sinners: but if a man be a server of God, and doth his will, him he heareth. 32 From the beginning of the world it hath not been heard, that any man hath opened the eyes of one born blind. 33 Unless this man were of God, he could not do any thing. 34 They answered, and said to him: Thou wast wholly born in sins, and dost thou teach us? And they cast him out. 35 Jesus heard that they had cast him out: and when he had found him, he said to him: Dost thou believe in the Son of God? 36 He answered, and said: Who is he, Lord, that I may believe in him? 37 And Jesus said to him: Thou hast both seen him; and it is he that talketh with thee. 38 And he said: I believe, Lord. And falling down, he adored him.

Mary Magdalen and Cedonius

Tradition has it that fourteen years after Our Lord's death, St. Mary [Magdalen] was put in a boat by the Jews without sails or oars - along with Sts. Lazarus and Martha, St. Maximin (who baptized her), St. Sidonius ("the man born blind"), her maid Sera, and the body of St. Anne, the mother of the Blessed Virgin. Expelled by persecutions from the Holy Land, they were put adrift out to sea in a frail boat with neither rudder nor mast. They traversed the Mediterranean and landed at the place called Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer near Arles. Mary Magdalene came the shores of Southern France, to Marseille. St. Mary spent the rest of her life as a contemplative in a cave known as Sainte-Baume.

Sergius and Mohammed

A legend of the Christians is, that the chief help Mohammed had in the contriving his Koran was from a Nestorian monk named Sergius. supposed to be the same person with the monk Boheira. with whom Mohammed. in his younger years, had some conference at Bosra, a city of Syria Damascena, where that monk resided.' To confirm which supposition, a passage has been produced from an Arab writer, who says that Boheira's name, in the books of the Christians, is Sergius ; but this is only a conjecture.