

A 717 In coena Domini. Sermo unicus.

St. Vincent Ferrer, O.P. – Sermon on Holy Thursday

"Do this in commemoration of me," (1 Cor 11:24)

In our present sermon, three great solemnities come together. First is that of the supper which Christ wished to eat with his disciples accepting farewells from them. Second, is the washing of the feet of the apostles, for Christ who was Lord and king and master wanted humbly to wash the feet of the apostles so he might give us an example of humility. These two solemnities are told in the gospel, and after dinner there is a sermon. Third is of the blessed sacrament of the altar, about which today's epistle speaks. We treat the wonderful usefulness of this sacrament in the sermon for Corpus Christi. Today, however the matter at hand is the institution of this sacrament, namely why and how this sacrament was instituted and ordained by Christ. But first the Virgin Mary is saluted.

"Do this," etc. I am seeking in sacred scripture the manner and reason why Christ, true God and man wished to institute and ordain this blessed sacrament. And I have found five principal reasons.

- First, for showing a memorial,
- Second, for perpetual prayer,
- Third, for spiritual nourishment,
- Fourth, for medicinal healing, and
- Fifth for heavenly promotion.

MEMORIAL

About the first Christ speaks in our theme to priests and generally to all Christians saying: "Do this," namely, sacrifice, "in remembrance of me," namely, by celebrating, offering, sacrificing in memory of me, not for the acquisition of money, nor for vainglory, or for showing hypocrisy. And you laity do this, namely, hearing mass, serving, contemplating and communicating in my memory.

The first reason for the institution of this sacrament is to keep a memorial, namely, for pointing out what should be adored by man. This reason is based on a philosophical principle which says, "Nothing is in the intellect unless it is first in the senses." For example, just as by a church which has five doors, about which it is true to say that no one is in the church unless he entered through one of these doors. So nothing is in the intellect unless it entered through one of those, namely, physical senses, either according to the property or according to the diversity of the thing, either according to the fittingness or difference of the thing, or according to quantity, or quality, or action or passion.

God, however in his essence is a substance imperceptible to any bodily sense, because he cannot be seen by physical eyes, nor heard by ears, nor touched by hands, etc. Because of this God, from the beginning of the world until now always wished to be

adored by some visible form or figure. It is certain that God appeared to Adam, Abraham and other holy patriarchs who did not see God in his essence, but they beheld a form or figure, which was not God. And they did not adore that form or figure, but God in that form or figure. And so God, through that form or figure, entered into the understanding of the one to whom he appeared.

Then came the time of the prophets, among whom Moses was the first. The Lord appeared to him in the form of fire when he was keeping sheep for his father-in-law Jethro. And Moses did not adore the fire, nor the bush, but God in that image, through which he entered into the intellect of Moses. Thus when God in Exodus 20 gave the law on Mount Sinai, he appeared there in the form of fire, and Moses and the people adored not the fire but God in that form in which he wished to be adored, for showing his activity in punishing, that he might frighten them, and so Moses said to the people, "Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that the dread of him might be in you, and you should not sin," (Ex 20:20).

Then he commanded Moses that he would build an ark, covered with purest gold inside and out, and on top there were two Cherubim who held the propitiatory, that is the table of gold, and within the ark were the two tablets of the law, the staff of Aaron and a jar of manna. The entire Jewish people adored, not the wood of the ark, nor the gold, but God, because in that form or figure he wished to be adored. The reason is, just as the ark held that which was contained in it, so God would keep and conserve that people, as long as they believed in him and obeyed him. And when they were carrying it the people adored, and today the Jews ridicule us when we adore God in the host.

Then at the time of the kings, after king Solomon at God's command built the temple and put the ark in the holy of holies of the temple, nor could it be seen, God wished to be adored in another form, namely, in the figure of a cloud, 3 Kgs 8: "The Lord said that he would dwell in a cloud," (v. 12). And Solomon and all the people were not adoring the cloud, but God in that form. Reason: because then he wished to be adored in the form of a cloud, for just as a cloud cools against the heat of the sun, so at the time of Solomon the Jews had a great refreshing period of peace and quiet with all its enemies.

Finally, God came and took human form in the virginal womb, and as long as Christ lived, God was adored in human form. But when Christ wished to withdraw from this world through bodily death, and after he had instituted the other sacraments, Christ instituted another form, or figure, under which God wished to be adored, not fearsome fire, nor the ark, nor clouds, but bread which is better than the aforesaid figures, and gives life; because the life of man is fundamentally sustained by bread, other foods are for well being. In this it is shown that God gives the life of grace and glory to those believing in him and obeying him. See the reason why he wanted to be adored now under such a form or figure, because we do not adore bread, nor whiteness which represents divine purity, nor roundness which represents divine eternity, which lacks beginning and end, but God contained within. Priests are to take care lest the hosts be broken or stained. See why Christ says, "Do this in remembrance of me," namely, of my passion. Hosea 14: "They shall be converted that sit under his shadow: they shall live upon wheat, and they

shall blossom as a vine: his memorial shall be as the wine of Lebanon. Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols?" (Hos 14:8-9). The law of Moses was the shadow of Christ. Also, from the New Testament, the text, "Because through the Mystery of the Word made flesh, [the new light of Thy glory hath shone upon the eyes of our mind]," (Preface for the Christmas Mass at Dawn).

OFFERING

The second reason for the institution of this sacrament as a perpetual offering. To explain this it must be noted that God from the beginning of the world wished that all men should offer sacrifice. Reason: because he is the source which gives us everything, and so he wishes that we make some offering to him. But the offerings changed just as also the figures or forms of worship changed.

Cain offered the fruits of the earth, worse. Abel however from the flocks, better. Melchisedech however standing before Abraham offered to the Lord not grain nor lambs but bread and wine, (Cf Gen 14:18f). Even the pagans who were living in the land of Canaan before the children of Israel lived there, offered their sons and daughters to idols. Tell now of how they molded idols from brass, and with great excitement dragged their children through fire, and offered them to that idol – a father did not even feel to weep for his son, etc. About which David said: "And they sacrificed their sons, and their daughters to devils," (Ps 105:37). But it was a wicked sacrifice and forbidden, and so God commanded the children of Israel to offer, not their sons nor their daughters, but animals: oxen, sheep, heifers, lambs and doves, etc. Ant this lasted until the time of Christ, who would change the sacrifice and get rid of all the other sacrifices and ways of sacrificing, namely those of Cain, Abel, Aaron, etc. He chose the sacrifice of Melchisedech who offered bread and wine, who was the priest of the Most High God. According to the prophet. "The Lord hath sworn, and he will not repent: [Thou art a priest for ever according to the order of Melchisedech.] " (Ps 109:4). He doesn't say "according to the order of Aaron," who offered animals.

See here the perpetual offering, and it is of such a power that in the whole world there is not any other sacrifice remaining, only that one, because with its coming, all other sacrifices ought to cease. So neither Muslims [Agareni], nor Jews nor other pagans have any sacrifice, for God does not allow that there be any other sacrifice in the world. And so the prophecy of Malachi is fulfilled, "I have no pleasure in you, says the Lord of hosts: and I will not receive a gift of your hand. For from the rising of the sun even to the going down, my name is great among the Gentiles, and in every place there is sacrifice, and there is offered to my name a clean oblation: " (Mal 1:10-11). It speaks to the priests of the old law. This text [auctoritas] ought to be written in gold letters. Note, "in every place." The Jews dared not offer sacrifice but only in Jerusalem, under pain of death. And it is called a "clean oblation," on the other hand the oblation of the Jews, unclean. The priests of the Jews are butchers, etc., but the Christian oblation is clean. Priests should take care that the altar cloth and the corporals are clean, and the hosts are clean and the wine, chalice etc. In this holy sacrifice God comes down every day, and although he does not depart from heaven, just as the rays of the sun descend, and comes in through

every open window, and nevertheless do not separate from the sun or from the heavens. "Behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world," (Mt 28:20).

REFRESHMENT

The third reason for this institution was spiritual refreshment. You certainly understand that no living creature, neither corporeal nor spiritual can live, nor survive in being without food, which, for bodily creatures is evident to the eyes. About spiritual creatures however, namely angels, it is evident because even they need food, spiritual food not corporal. Authority: Raphael said to Tobias, "For when I was with you, I was there by the will of God: may you bless him, and sing praises to him. I seemed indeed to eat and to drink with you: but I use an invisible meat and drink, which cannot be seen by men," (Tob 12:18-19).

So God, as a good provider [paterfamilias] provides bodily food for bodies, when he said to Adam living in paradise, "Of every tree of paradise you shall eat," (Gn 2:16). See, the first food. He did not give permission to eat meat and fish nor drink wine until up to the time of Noah, after 1,500 years had gone by. If you might say, he gave fruit as a snack [modicam confortationem]. I respond, no, he gave fruit with water then as a substantial meal [maiolem confortationem], now we eat capons, hens and drink wine. Hence God says, "Behold I have given you every herb bearing seed upon the earth, and all trees that have in themselves seed of their own kind, to be your meat, and to all the beasts of the earth," (Gn 1:29f). Then, after the flood in the time of Noah, when he washed the world of its uncleanness, he changed the menu, because the waters of the flood had so destroyed the earth that its fruit then would not have been so good, nor as nutritious as before. So now it is not good to eat only fruit and to drink water. Therefore after the flood God gave permission to eat meat, fish and drink wine, saying, "All the fowls of the air, and all that move upon the earth: all the fishes of the sea are delivered into your hand. And every thing that moves and lives shall be meat for you," (Gn 9:2-3).

Then, in the desert where the children of Israel ran out of food of the aforesaid kinds, God provided manna for them, which every day descended in the morning like coriander seeds, which lasted until they arrived to the promised land. So David, "The eyes of all hope in thee, O Lord: and you give them meat" (Ps 144:15). But he had not yet provided spiritual food for the souls, which are spiritual, and the soul is the most important part of man. Therefore David, weeping, said, "They were hungry and thirsty: their soul fainted in them," (Ps 106:5).

But Christ came, who instituted food, and spiritual food for souls, namely this holy sacrifice, which is not only an offering, but also for spiritual refreshment. In this food souls are restored and strengthened in devotion and virtues. Nor should you believe that this food would go down just into the stomach of the body to be digested there, but rather into the stomach of the soul, namely, the memory. About this food David prophesied saying: "And [God] had rained down manna upon them to eat, and had given them the bread of heaven. Man ate the bread of angels: he sent them provisions in abundance," (Ps 77:24-25). First he speaks of the manna of the Jews, where it says, "And had rained down manna," namely from the clouds and not from the empyrean heaven, but from the

aerial heaven. Then he speaks of this sacrament, "and had given them the bread of heaven." He is not speaking of manna like the Jews speak, because angels do not eat the manna. Note "bread;" this cannot be understood of manna, because it was just one food, but of this sacrament in which is the body of Christ, soul, divinity, powers and influences of all good things. Therefore he says "bread", and thus the church sings: "The Bread of Angels becomes the bread of men; The Bread of heaven ends all prefigurations: What wonder! a poor and humble servant consumes him, the Lord." [Thomas Aquinas: Panis angelicus].

Practically speaking, see how Christ on this day at the supper took a loaf of unleavened bread, for this reason we consecrate unleavened bread, and raising his eyes to heaven blessed and said those same words which we say in the consecration. And at the moment the words are said, the substance of bread does not remain there, because it has been converted into the body of Christ, and because it was a living body, therefore there was blood and soul and divinity there, but the apostles were not seeing flesh there.

And he received communion first, just as the priest first communicates himself, then the others, nor by breaking the host is the body of Christ broken, just as the image is broken in breaking a mirror. Then he communicated the apostles saying, "Take and eat, this is my body." "Lord," Peter said, "this bread is your body?" "Peter," Christ said, "it is not bread, but it is my body. Therefore, eat." After he had received communion Peter said, "O Lord this food comforted me completely and enlightened my soul." Then Christ said to him, "I give you the power of doing the same."

He then gave communion to Judas, who without devotion and badly prepared took it and sinned just as bad by badly receiving communion, as by betraying Christ. If it is asked why Christ gave communion to him whom he knew to be in sin and ill prepared, I reply: because he did not wish to make it public, because his sin was hidden. So neither should a parish priest deny communion to someone whom he knows to be a secret sinner, if he lines up with others to receive communion, because he would defame him.

Every Christian ought to communicate on Easter etc. Children from the age of twelve or fourteen years. So Christ says, "This is the bread that came down from heaven," (Jn 6:59), not from the aerial heaven but from the empyreal. In apostolic times Christians received communion each day. "And they were persevering...in the communication of the breaking of bread," (Acts 2:42). "Bread," Gloss, of the Eucharist. Then it was required to communicate every Sunday. Then in the four principal festivals of the year. Later it was mandated that once a year, namely on Easter everyone should communicate. But good counsel says it is good to communicate on the four special feast days. John 6: "Amen, amen I say unto you: Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, you shall not have life in you." (Jn 6:54).

HEALING

The fourth reason for the institution of the sacrament was for a medicinal healing, namely for curing bodily and spiritual wounds. All evils, tribulations and miseries, and ultimately death itself had their origin and came from Adam's eating of that food contrary

to the commandment of God. From that food the doors to all evils were opened, because otherwise people would have lived in the earthly paradise without any miseries and punishments whatsoever. And after they had lived there according to the divine plan, God would have said to Michael, "Descend into the earthly paradise and bring back here all those there who are of such an age." Without pain and death we would have ascended to glory, but because of the sin of Adam, etc. Therefore, the Grammarian says, [Mala mali malo mala contulit omnia malo]. "The jaw of the evil man by an apple brings all evil to evil." Construction: "mala", that is the jaw, "mali" of an evildoer, namely Adam, "malo," by an apple, "omnia mala contulit," brings all evil, "malo," to an evil, supply world. Even though Eve had eaten of this food, if Adam had not eaten, we would not have been obliged to this evil, nor would we have been conceived in original sin. Only Eve would have been punished.

The Lord God, seeing that the devil had so ordained that from fruit would come all evil, on the other hand ordained that from the fruit, namely, of the tree of Mary, to whom we pray, "Blessed is the fruit of thy womb," would come all good to the whole world. Just as the devil, by his scheme knew how to do to much, that from the fruit he would wound and plague all peoples, on the other hand I shall make a universal medicine against all sicknesses, both of the body and of the soul. Therefore the church sings, "This work of our salvation order has arranged, etc.

The question here is, because many sick and wounded in body receive communion, who nevertheless are not cured in their soul from sins, moreover their sins are increased, how is it then a curative medicine?

I respond that a physicians giving medicine to a sick person consider two things, namely the disposition of the sick one and the usefulness of the medicine. First, they consider the disposition of the sick one. Therefore before they give strong laxatives to a sick person, they mix him a syrup to prepare and dispose him. And, they look to and consider the final usefulness, because although they might cure the sick one, nevertheless they choose not to, because the medicine might kill him, as is evident with a certain king. There is required in the patient both a certain disposition and ultimate usefulness. And if either of these is lacking, it is not the fault of the medicine.

It is the same for the proposed question, if someone is indisposed and ill prepared receives this medicine, or purgation, without previously disposing syrup. The four spoons of syrup for disposing [a sinner] are: contrition of the heart, confession of the lips, deeds of satisfaction, and bodily affliction with the hot water of tears. So a soul is cured from sins. It is the same for the body. Since God knows that the sickness of the body overflows to the soul, sometimes God gives illness to the body for the health of the soul, because [physical] health and the curing of the illness would be harmful to the soul. And so he does not give health, which he would otherwise infallibly give if it were [spiritually] useful.

Without doubt therefore you hold that if a person is well disposed and well prepared and receives this medicine, both the body and the soul gain health, and so the priest says

[when placing a particle of the consecrated host into the chalice], "May this sacrosanct mixture of the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ become for me and all who receive health of mind and body."

See the reason why it was instituted as a universal medicine. Authority. "The most High has created medicines out of the earth, and a wise man will not abhor them," (Sir 38:4). Note, "has created." It seems that this text contains a contradiction, because to create is to make something out of nothing, according to the Philosopher, but when something is made out of something, it is not said to be created but made. Since, however, it is said, "The most High hath created medicines out of the earth," he does not seem to create but to make. I respond, that in this sacrament there is not properly speaking generation, nor alteration, nor transmutation, because in alteration and substantial change the subject remains the same. Even of that which happens through generation something remains, as is clear in ashes. But it is not so in creation. Because in a thing newly created there is nothing which existed previously, as is clear with the soul newly created by God. So in this sacrament, beneath the whiteness is a substance, or matter of bread, and when transubstantiation takes place, all is changed, because nothing remains of the matter or substance of bread. Therefore it comes closer to creation on this account, because it takes place entirely from divine power. Therefore he says, "The most High...out of the earth," that is out of earthly substance creates medicine. He does not say generated, made or formed, because in these there always remains something of the term from which it came [de termino a quo] in the term which it becomes [terminum ad quem], which is not the case in transubstantiation. "And a wise man will not abhor them," because ordinarily fastidious people abhor medicines, like laxatives or pills, because they would rather not take them. But a prudent doctor hides the medicine with honey or some other good [flavor], so it is not seen, or tasted. Thus Christ the best physician hides his flesh which cannot be seen or sensed, in the host. Therefore he says, "a wise man," etc.

Christ could have made it that he be seen in the consecrated host, like an image is seen in a mirror. But such a host ought not be consumed by a priest as the Doctors of theology say, because it might seem abhorrent visibly to eat the flesh of a man. Therefore Christ is not seen. Rather he remains hidden under that veil of whiteness, like a king under a cauldron. Isaiah, to whom this sacrament was revealed, says, "Truly you are a hidden God, the God of Israel the savior," (Isa 45:15).

HEAVEN

The fifth reason for the institution was for heavenly promotion, so that we might ascend to heaven, because by nature no one can ascend to heaven, only God. "The heaven of heaven is the Lord's: but the earth he has given to the children of men," (Ps 113:24). Note, "heaven," that is, the glory of heaven, "the Lord's", supply belongs to him by nature. "But the earth he has given to the children of men."

Therefore if we wish to ascend to heaven, we need a promoter and helper by whom we ascend, because Christ says, "No man has ascended into heaven, but he who descends from heaven, the Son of man who is in heaven," (Jn 3:13). Unless this text is properly

understood it could be an occasion for despair. "No man has ascended into heaven," therefore neither the innocent, nor the penitent, nor martyrs, nor confessors etc., because none of them descended from heaven. But it must be understood in this way, "No man has ascended into heaven," supply, by his own power, but well does he ascend into heaven by virtue of the body of Christ contained in this sacrament. For just as a fog, which in the morning lies on the ground which of itself cannot ascend because of its weight, but when the sun come which warms it, then the sun makes it ascend, so for us who are terrestrial and heavy, by our own power we cannot ascend into heaven, but the sun of justice shines, which is in this sacrament, and by his power we are able to rise. Therefore it is called viaticum, that is the food of travelers.

Tell of the miracle of Hugo of Saint Victor, who when he received communion said, "Ascend Son to Father and Spirit to God, who sent him." And he died and his soul ascended with Christ into heaven. This was prefigured in the prophet Elijah, sleeping. "And the angel of the Lord... touched him, and said to him: Arise, eat: for you have yet a great way to go," (3 Kgs 19:7). When a man is in mortal sin he is sleeping like the prophet in the desert, in danger from the lions and leopards of hell. And it is said to him by the angel, that is the priest, "Arise," you who are sleeping and rise up from the dead, etc., and "eat" that is by receiving communion. "And [he] walked in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights, unto the mount of God," (v.8). In sacred scripture a day signifies prosperity, and night signifies adversity. The divine commandments are ten, which are to be kept in four ways, namely in the heart, by thinking, on the lips by speaking, in deed by doing, and by persevering in their fulfillment. Four times ten is forty, and so we shall go up to the mountain of God, into the kingdom of heaven. Amen

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1 Cor 11

23 For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread.

24 And giving thanks, broke, and said: Take ye, and eat: this is my body, which shall be delivered for you: this do for the commemoration of me.

25 In like manner also the chalice, after he had supped, saying: This chalice is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as often as you shall drink, for the commemoration of me.

26 For as often as you shall eat this bread, and drink the chalice, you shall shew the death of the Lord, until he come.

27 Therefore whosoever shall eat this bread, or drink the chalice of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and of the blood of the Lord.

28 But let a man prove himself: and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of the chalice.

29 For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself, not discerning the body of the Lord.