

St. Vincent Ferrer, O.P. – Sermon on Mt 7:21

Matthew 7 Douay Trans.

21 Not every one that saith to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that doth the will of my Father who is in heaven, he shall enter into the kingdom of heaven.

22 Many will say to me in that day: Lord, Lord, have not we prophesied in thy name, and cast out devils in thy name, and done many miracles in thy name?

23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, you that work iniquity.

24 Every one therefore that heareth these my words, and doth them, shall be likened to a wise man that built his house upon a rock,

25 And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and they beat upon that house, and it fell not, for it was founded on a rock.

26 And every one that heareth these my words, and doth them not, shall be like a foolish man that built his house upon the sand,

27 And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and they beat upon that house, and it fell, and great was the fall thereof.

"He who does the will of my Father who is in heaven, he shall enter into the kingdom of heaven," (Mt 7:21)

These words are originally from Matthew 7 and are read as this Sunday's Gospel. This text is the word and teaching of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ saying, "He who does the will," etc. (Mt 7:21). We have here a subtle question. Why did Christ say that he who does the will of the Father will enter the kingdom of heaven, and not **his** will, or the will of the Holy Spirit? For the response to this it must be understood that just as the three divine persons have but one essence, divinity and eternity, so also they have only one will, knowledge and power. The will of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is one and the same. Whatever the Father wants, the Son and Holy Spirit also wants, because it is the same will. In this way it happens that it is said that the sun melts snow, and it is not said that the rays or the heat, although they all work together. Same if it is asked what causes things to ripen. It is said the sun, and not the rays or the heat, and there is only one sun. So also is it in divine things, where the Father is the principle, not **from** the principle. Therefore it is said, "Whoever does the will of my Father," etc. And according to this the Apostle says: "For of him," of the Father, "and by him," the Son, "and in him," the Holy Spirit, "are all things," (Rom 11:36). The response to the question is therefore clear, because by naming the will of the Father, he names also his own will and that of the Holy Spirit. Therefore he says, "Whoever does the will," etc.

So that we may enter into the kingdom of heaven after we depart from the misery of this world, let us see what is the will of God, what God wants of us. The will of God the Apostle declares to us in a certain scripture saying, "you may prove what is the good, and the acceptable [beneplacens], and the perfect will of God," (Rom 12:2). In this scripture it is shown that God wishes three things for us, according to the fact that the will of God is threefold.

First, he wishes penitential conversion [conversionem penitentialem], this is the good will of God.

Second, persistence in virtue [durationem virtuaalem], this is acceptable [beneplacens].

Third, celestial salvation [salvationem caelestialem], and this is the perfect will of God.

Because he who has these three, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven. Therefore he states the theme, "He who does the will of my Father who is in heaven, he shall enter into the kingdom of heaven," (Mt 7:21).

PENITENTIAL CONVERSION

First, God wishes penitential conversion, because whoever a man is, whether he is religious, or a cleric, or a layman, if he be a sinner and of wicked life, God does not wish his damnation but he wishes his penitential conversion, that he turn his back to the world and to creatures, and turn his face to God. This happens through penance, through contrition for sins and a purpose of amendment, by confessing, by doing his penance, by praying, hearing masses and sermons. This is the good will of God.

For a wise silversmith, after he made a cup of gold or silver, or a statue or crown, or jewelry, with great labor and expense, and if by some chance it falls into a dry and deep well, the silversmith doesn't walk away from it. Rather he climbs down [there] because the thing is precious. So too if it falls into the dust, he will clean it. If it falls into the sewer or is scratched by rocks or broken, it is fixed in a forge. If it falls into water or into fire, or if it is stained from old age, he doesn't leave it because of this, but he polishes and cleans it, and then its beauty returns.

So God acts. God made a precious treasure of pure gold when he made man and woman. From the beginning God made vessels of brass and copper, when he formed corruptible corporeal creatures. [He made vessels] from silver, when he created incorruptible corporeal creatures [heavenly bodies], but [he made a vessel] of gold when he made man. A man is worth more than any corporeal creature. So man was not made by God like other creatures, etc. "Let us make man," etc. (Gen 1:26). And he does not say, "Let there be man," like he said for the other creatures. Behold, the vessel of gold, if by some chance it should fall, etc. Man falls into the deep well of pride, by lacking the moisture of devotion. A proud man believes he can ascend and descend with Lucifer. But the silversmith himself descends lest he be lost, when he gives him compunction of the heart, and he thinks within himself, saying, "What are you proud of, of your courage? Tomorrow you will lose it. Same of beauty, of dignity, office, of good works." Then a man is rescued from the well, when he is humbled. Then the vessel of gold returns to the table, to the grace of God from which it fell. Therefore Joel, ch. 2 "Thus says the Lord: Be converted to me," (Joel 2:12).

Second he falls into the dust of avarice, when he extorts interest [facit usuram], or robs, etc. David says, "Not so the wicked," like the just, "not so: but like the dust, which the wind drives from the face of the earth.," (Ps 1:4), but God like a good silversmith picks it up and cleans it when he gives to him a heart for making restitution.

Third he falls into the sewer, the excrement of lust, when he sins by leaving his wife, or vice versa. Same for those not married. But the good silversmith washes it, when the lustful person weeps for his sins. The sins are washed away by the water of tears and the blood of discipline. "This" the lustful one, "is he that came," supply to him, "by water and blood," (1 Jn 5:6).

Fourth it falls on hard rocks by the sin of envy, then the hard weld [coniunctio] which is charity is broken. But God, the good silversmith, repairs the weld, when he gives to him a heart sweet and benevolent and loving to all. So the Apostle states, "But above all these things have charity, which is the bond of perfection," (Col 3:14). See, it is made solid and joined.

Fifth, he falls into flowing water from the sin of gluttony. Water emerges from a spring and flows to the sea, so the sin of gluttony is the fountain of lust, because the glutton immediately runs toward lust.

Sixth he falls into fire through the sin of anger, which is nothing but fire. The angry person says, "By the body of Christ!" etc. and "I shall take revenge," etc., but this fire is put out by the water of forgiveness and patience, forgiving just as God forgives us our sins.

Seventh he becomes rusty [rubiginosum] from the sin of laziness, because just as a house which is not lived in, falls apart by itself, so a person who wastes time. But God the good silversmith repairs it.

See why God wishes penitential conversion. Authority: "Is it my will that a sinner should die, saith the Lord God, and not that he should be converted from his ways, and live?" (Ez 18:23). Note: "that he should be converted." Just as when he was in sin he held his face toward sins, he is converted by turning his back to sins and his face to God. And this is the good will of God. The Apostle, Paul, says: "For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, Who will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth," (1 Tim 2:3). Note that he wishes all men to be saved. But you might ask, "Why does this not happen?" Response: because you do not wish to give up and draw back from your sins. Although God wishes all to be saved, nevertheless he does not compel free will. Therefore infidels and bad Christians, hardened in sin, do not wish to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. This touches the infidels, because if they are to be saved, they must first come to the knowledge of the truth. Behold why the theme says, "Whoever wishes to be saved," etc.

SUSTAINED VIRTUE

Second, I say that God wants from us a sustained virtue [durationem virtuaem], when it is said the "acceptable...will of God," (Rom 12:2). After man has converted to God, he should endure and persevere in virtue. Before a man chooses a good way of living he ought to think hard about it, look around and see what manner of good living will be better and more useful for him, so that he might be able to save his soul. If his own understanding does not suffice for this, he ought to seek counsel from discreet and wise persons. And after he had chosen his state, he ought to remain in that chosen state and persevere.

But many because of inconstancy revert to a change of status. This is clear, first for religious. The Carthusians say, "What am I doing? I now make progress for myself alone. Would it not be better to preach? etc. Behold a diabolical temptation. They ought to say, "It is true that it is good to preach, but I have chosen this way, therefore in this religious order I wish to continue." The mendicant religious too say, "Because the order did not provide me with clothes, but only with food, and not very well, therefore I need to have benefactors [familiaritates]. Would it not be better for me to be a Carthusian?" And so the heart does not rest. Therefore people like these

never have devotion. The clergyman says, "You have to have a woman as a housekeeper, etc"., and it is an occasion of sin. Therefore if you were a religious, you would not need one, etc. Also the laity are tempted to move out of the city, that they might live well. And those who are outside [are tempted] to come to the city etc. Thus the devil tempts them so that few there are who are able to live quietly and peacefully.

Therefore a man ought to reform himself and persevere in virtue, because God wills it so. Authority: In John's last chapter we read that St. Peter asked Christ about John the evangelist, saying, : "Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus said to him: So I will have him to remain till I come, what is it to you? "(Jn 21:21). This is a prefiguration of what I said, namely, perseverance in virtue [duratio virtualis], because "John" means grace, or "in whom there is grace." God wishes that those who are in grace endure, and persevere. "If I wish him to remain? Lord, for how long, through the year or for many years?" He replies, "till I come," namely, in death. See the perseverance in virtue.

Note here the example of St. Benedict. A certain canon regular, having heard of his fame and that of his order, came to him seeking that he receive him in his order, because his own order was very lax. etc. St. Benedict replied saying, "The religious order [religio] of St. Augustine is as good as mine, so you should not change." The canon, now indignant, thinking strongly that St. Benedict was not pleased at his wish to enter his religion, responded asking, "Why therefore in your books do you praise the perfection of life, if you do not want to receive me?" And Benedict said, "I praise the perfection of life, but I do not approve of the change of status." So the Apostle, Paul, " Let every man abide in the same calling in which he was called." (1 Cor 7:20). So God wishes.

Therefore David said after he had returned to God, "O Lord, in your favor, you gave strength, or fortitude to my beauty (namely to my status, or spiritual life)," (Ps 29:8). So it is the acceptable will of God. David, "The Lord takes pleasure in them that fear him: and in them that hope in his mercy." (Ps 146:11). Note "in them that fear him," namely who fear to change their state, because just as the tree which is transplanted, dies, or nearly dies, so for a person who changes state.

HEAVENLY SALVATION

Third, I say that God wants heavenly salvation for us all. Note, the sequence: first he wishes conversion; second, perseverance; third, salvation, because for this end he created us. Every agent intends to bring his work to the end for which it was made. So Christ said of himself, "For the Son of Man is come to save that which was lost," (Mt 18:11). A is lost in this life in which God placed us, but God in flesh comes showing us the way to paradise, saying, "This is the way, walk in it: and go not aside neither to the right hand, nor to the left," (Isa 30:21). O, the people say, if I should travel on this path, I would not be rich. Therefore they extort interest, defraud, rob and so on with the other sins. See how they perish against the will of God, who does not wish to compel free will. So Christ says, "Even so it is not the will of your Father, who is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish." (Mt 18:14). Therefore God wishes heavenly salvation, and this is the perfect will of God, which leads to paradise. "He, who has begun a good work in you, will perfect it unto the day of Christ Jesus," (Phil 1:6) namely in death, when he receives the soul from the body.