

St. Vincent Ferrer – On Predestination (Jn 15:)

John 15:1-5 Douay transl. I am the true vine; and my Father is the husbandman. 2 Every branch in me, that beareth not fruit, he will take away: and every one that beareth fruit, he will purge it, that it may bring forth more fruit. 3 Now you are clean by reason of the word, which I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abide in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in me. 5 I am the vine; you the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit: for without me you can do nothing.

"Abide in me, and I in you," (Jn 15:4). In this sermon I shall explain three doctrines or conclusions which basically and completely explain the matter of predestination. This teaching will be good for illuminating our intellects and enkindling our affections. But first, the "Hail Mary."

"Abide in me," etc. We have three conclusions in this sermon.

- A. First, that God before the creation of the world, eternally chose the good with certitude, [certitudinaliter]
- B. Second, that predestination or preknowledge does not take away free will, but it remains freely. [liberaliter]
- C. Third that whether we have been foreknown or predestined, we ought to live well and perseveringly. [perseveranter]

A. ETERNALLY CERTAINLY CHOSEN

The first conclusion, that God, before the creation of the world, eternally chose the good, with certitude. Because before he created anything, the heaven or angels, he knew how many prelates, how many religious there would be in the world, from whom so many were to be saved, and so for every status. I shall explain this through a parable about a king wishing to celebrate the wedding of his son. He did five things.

First he wrote the invitations, who and how many there would be, and he decided their quality and quantity and condition.

Second he chose and arranged the place or the hall where they would eat.

Third he arranged for the food.

Fourth the servants, distinguished and experienced,

Fifth, he arranged a place where the invited could be made ready, where they are able to change their clothes, etc.

And then, the execution of the banquet followed. Now you understand the whole plan of God before the creation of the world, and then God willed to hold the wedding banquet for his son assuming human nature in the oneness of person. Because just as a husband and wife are not two but one flesh, as is said in Matthew 19, so divinity and humanity in Christ are one person. This nature was married in the hall of the Virgin's womb. Of this wedding Matt 22 speaks, "The kingdom of heaven is likened to a king, who made a marriage for his son," (Mt 22:2). And before he spent anything, that is "created," he chose saying, "So many prelates shall eat at the banquet," and so for the other states, and that eternal choice is called predestination, that is

prior— before creation – destination. He also foreknew the damned, but it is not called election or predestination, because he did not choose someone for damnation, but he foreknew that such a person would be damned, etc. About this election scripture says, Eph 1: "He chose us [in him] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and unspotted in his sight in charity. Who has predestinated us unto the adoption of children through Jesus Christ," (Eph 1:4-5).

Second, he arranges the place. God seeing in the book of predestination so many noble ones invited, for this reason he created the empyreal heaven, not for himself, because he already was living in the palace of his eternity, Isa 57: "[Thus says the] High and the Eminent one who inhabits eternity: and his name is Holy... on high," (v. 15). Of this home, Bar 3: "O Israel, how great is the house of God, and how vast is the place of his possession! It is great, and has no end; it is high and immense," (vv. 24-25). And like a palace of a king preparing for a wedding it is sublimely decorated. So also the empyreal heaven. About which see St. Thomas I, q. 66, a. 3, when Christ speaks on the day of judgment, Mt 25, "Come, blessed of my Father, possess the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world," (v. 34).

Third he orders a variety of foods, namely the grades of glory and enjoyments, the orders and distinctions of the angels and saints. About which Christ in Jn 14, "In my Father's house there are many mansions," (v.2). And in Luke 22, he says, "You may eat and drink at my table, in my kingdom," (v. 30). You realize that there is no [actual] drinking there etc., but metaphorically in experiencing glory.

Fourth, he creates the angels as the servants and ministers of the banquet. If it is said, "The servants are more noble than the diners," the response is that we are parents of the bride, human nature. And so the king wishes that we be seated. If the king were to take as his wife, the daughter of a shepherd, the nobles and knights would respect her parents. So Christ took human nature, and wished that the angels would serve. Hebrews, "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent to minister to them, who shall receive the inheritance of salvation?" (Heb 1:14). Note, "all," universally etc.

Fifth, he makes the world, so that here we might prepare ourselves, and wash our hands of sins through penitence and change our clothes. If you are wearing the old shirt of pride, change it and put on the new shirt of humility. And so for the rest. Eccle 3: "He has made all things good in their time, and has delivered the world to their consideration [dispositioni]," (Eccles 3:11), other translation is "to their disputation [disputationi, Vulg.]," namely active and passive, so that they might dispose themselves and be disposed, by dignifying themselves for the banquet. See now what predestination is. And the first conclusion is clear, which also is written in Romans 8: "For whom he foreknew, he also predestinated to be made conformable [to the image of his Son,]... And whom he predestinated, them he also called. And whom he called, them he also justified. And whom he justified, them he also glorified." (vv. 29-30).

But there might be an argument to the contrary. One might say, "From these aforesaid five causes, the fifth, that this world has been made for preparing oneself, is opposed to the first, because if we are predestined, whether we prepare ourselves or not, we shall be there, because the knowledge of God cannot fail. I reply that this argument embodies ignorance or inattention. As if the king had invited many nobles to his wedding etc. And they would say, "Why do I have

to prepare?" Would that not be stupid? Rather, they ought to say, "Because the king invited me, I must prepare well, because if you come ill prepared, you would not enter, when you are at the gate, namely the gate of death. Ps. 117: "This is the gate of the Lord; the just shall enter into it," (v. 20). But, you say, "Divine predestination can never fail?" I reply that no change of creatures argues or places a change in God.

Remember the story in Mt 25 of the ten virgins invited etc. Note it is said "ten," because of the observance of the ten commandments, and "virgins," because of the purity which they should have, who are to enter. Five were prudent, because they prepared themselves. And five were foolish, because they did not prepare themselves, arguing from the reason of infallibility, alleging the aforesaid reason and argument: Because we were invited, we shall be received there. And so he calls them foolish. Note, and they who were prepared entered with him to the wedding, and the gates were closed to the unprepared. Ovid the poet, "It is harmful to postpone, when you are prepared." Finally the remaining virgins arrive. From this God is not variable and changeable in his knowledge, but the banquet includes the disposition of those entering.

It is clear the stupidity of many saying, "Why do I need to prepare?" I reply that if God by his very voice had said to you, "You shall be saved," and to another, "You shall be damned." It is understood conditionally. For even if it were possible that someone unprepared entered, he would be expelled, as Christ himself says in Matthew 22, "And the king went in to see the guests: and he saw there a man who had not on a wedding garment. And he said to him: 'Friend, how did you come in here,'" (Mt 22:11-12). Draw the conclusion. If those who are inside are unprepared, they will be expelled, how shall you enter unprepared? And so Matt 24: "be ready also, [because at what hour you know not the Son of man will come.]" (v. 44). If it is said, "O therefore God and his predestination is changed," it is not true, but predestination includes preparation. God is not changed, as Boethius says in III De consol., met. 9, but the creatures are changed.

Note the example of a ship without a sailor on the sea and the rock etc. So this world is a river. Whence 2 Sam 14: Behold, "We all die, and like waters that return no more," (v. 14). And it seems to us that the rock, that is, God is moved or changed, it is not true. And so we prepare ourselves through a good life because otherwise it will go badly for us. Behold the word of God through the mouth of the prophet, Ezekiel 33: Thus says the Lord: "Yea, if I shall say to the just that he shall surely live, and he, trusting in his justice, commits iniquity: all his justices shall be forgotten, and in his iniquity, which he has committed, in the same shall he die," (v. 13).

Likewise for preknowledge it says there, "And if I shall say to the wicked: You shall surely die: and he does penance for his sin, and does judgment and justice. And if that wicked man restores the pledge, and renders what he had robbed, and walks in the commandments of life, and does no unjust thing: he shall surely live, and shall not die," (Ez 33:14-15). Just as, therefore, predestination includes disposition, so preknowledge indisposition. And so God says, Jeremiah 18, "I will suddenly speak against a nation, and against a kingdom, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy it. If that nation against which I have spoken, shall repent of their evil, I also will repent of the evil that I have thought to do to them," (Jer 18:7-8). If you wish you can see the whole chapter Nabuchodonosor in Decretals 23, q. 4, where there is much about this.

B, FREE WILL REMAINS

The second conclusion, that divine and eternal predestination of the good and foreknowledge of the evil does not take away nor impede free will, moreover he remains in his liberty, otherwise he would be saved without merits, and he would be damned without demerits, because if someone did not have free will, he would not have sinned. This conclusion is stated in Ecclesiastes 5: "God made man from the beginning, and left him in the hand of his own counsel," (Sir 15:14). The interlinear Gloss, In liberty of free will, there follows "He added his commandments and precepts. If you will keep the commandments ..., they shall preserve you. He has set water and fire before you: stretch forth your hand to which you will. Before man is life and death, good and evil, that which he shall choose shall be given him" (Sir 15:15-18), Note, "from the beginning," of the world and of the life of each. Note the difference between commandment and precept, because commandments are affirmative precepts, which lead to virtues. And precepts are negative, which restrain from sins and oblige always. Otherwise for commandments, because from some just circumstances they should not be observed, even without sin one can do the opposite. But of negative [precepts] no situation of the world can one do the opposite without sin, for example [puta], "Thou shall not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain," (Ex 20:7). You are well able to swear an oath when necessary, but not in vain etc.

Note "he has set water," the good and devout life, "and fire," namely eternal, life, namely eternal and death, namely of Gehenna. "Good," of glory, "and evil" of punishment, "that which he shall choose [shall be given him]," (Sir 15:18). Now someone might say, "I want the good of glory," etc. you have a "wish" [velleitatem], but not a "will" [voluntatem], as St. Thomas says III, q. 21, a. 4, and in II Sent, dist. 33, where he says a wish is of impossibles. Proof. Just as he who says that he wants to go to the right but turns left, therefore lies; so, many want to go to paradise in word, but in fact they take the way of hell, namely of pride and vanity. Because therefore you take this way, you do not will to go to paradise but you will to go that opposite way. The same for the greedy and lustful person.

But God does not force someone to go to hell, rather he calls them back. Note the example of the spy in the tower, seeing two ways, the hard but safe way, and the delightful, straight, but dangerous way, full of robbers. And he cries out to the travelers saying that having abandoned the dangerous way they set out upon the other, and the travelers preferred not, rather they scoffed at [truffantur] the guide. The vision of that guide or spy does not force anyone to go via one way or the other, although he sees what they will be. This spy is God, high in the tower of eternity. Isaiah: God, "the High and the Eminent that inhabits eternity," (Isa 57:15), sees time past, present and future, because all things are present to him. There are two ways, the carnal and delightful life, and the spiritual, the difficult and hard penitential life. All want to go by the first way. "Wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many there are who go in there," (Mt 7: 13).

About the second he says in the same place, "How narrow is the gate, and strait is the way that leads to life: and few there are that find it!" (Mt 7:14). And he cries out through preachers or prophets warning, Isa 30, "This is the way, walk ye in it: and go not aside neither to the right hand, nor to the left," (v. 21). Right, when the good way is abandoned out of love of creatures. Left, when out of their fear you say, "O you wish that I dismiss this young man or that I take him back? I shall dismiss my son that he take back. The knowledge of God does not take away free

will, nor impedes it, rather it helps it by the precepts ordinations, preachings, warnings and inspirations, and he wills that we all be saved. Authority 1 Tim, 2: "For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who wills that all men be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator of God and men, the man Christ Jesus: who gave himself a redemption for all," (vv. 3-6). Therefore he does not take away free will.

C. LIVE A GOOD LIFE PERSEVERINGLY

Third conclusion. However we all are, whether predestined or foreknown, we ought to try to live a good life perseveringly. It is a rule of theology, that when God ordains some end, he ordains also the means to that end, without which he cannot come to that end. Even if he does not say, he is understood to have said, as is clear, because if the king makes someone governor, he understands that he should act justly, even if it is not stated in the mandate etc. Note how those to be saved are written in the book of predestination: "John shall be saved by his innocence. Peter through repentance," etc., so that not only is the end or the term written, but also the way or means through which it is attained. The same for the foreknown etc. If the pope appoints a bishop, it is understood that he be a priest, even if he does not say it. Same in nature, about rain from clouds. Same for predestination. And so there is a triple fault in those who say, "Why do I need to do good?"

The first is ignorance, because when it is written in the book of predestination that such a person is to be saved, it is stated also the way and the means by which, through his humility or mercy, etc. And so to regard the end without the means is ignorance, and such a one fails by saying, "Why must I work?" Rather certainly it is necessary to work. Otherwise you take away one part of the predestination, namely the way and means through which [the end is attained]. And so Gregory, 1 Dialog. *And it is placed 23, q. 4, c. to be obtained.* This perennial predestination to the eternal kingdom is so arranged by the omnipotent God that the chosen arrive there through effort, postulating that they merit to receive what the almighty God had disposed to give them before the ages. So you do not wish to go to hell. Remove the way and means, namely sin and you shall not go. "Woe to the wicked unto evil," (Isa 3:11).

The second defect is stupidity, to say, "Why must I do good?" Note how God knows all future things. He knows if today you shall eat dinner, just as if you shall be saved. If you say "Why must I prepare food for lunch," etc., no one makes an argument about lunch. Yet he argues about the soul. Same if you are ill: "Why do I need to call a doctor?" Because God already knows if I will be cured, etc. If you wish to be healed, the way is through doctors. And so they ought not to be dismissed. Also, God knows if this year you shall have a crop [bladum], so why is it necessary to plow. Response: Because this is the means. Also God knows if the king will have a victory over his enemies why is it necessary to have armed men? Response: because that is the means to victory.

The third defect is the greatest error. To deny the trinity is an error against only one article [of faith], and so for the others, but to say that the predestined ought not to do good is an error against all the articles, which it destroys. Why does God will to be incarnated? I respond: That men might ascend into heaven. And did God not know whether men are to be saved? Why did he need to be incarnated? And so for the others. Same what purpose faith, baptism etc. because

before them God knew who would be saved. It is a great error to presume the end without the means.

Now therefore the final conclusion is, as the theme says, "Abide in me," through a good life, "and I in you," (Jn 15:4) through grace. And so 2Pet 1, "Brethren, labor the more, that by good works you may make sure your calling and election. For doing these things, you shall not sin at any time. For so an entrance shall be ministered to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ," (2 Pet 1:10-11).