

**B093** –Dominica prima post octavam Paschae. Sermo primus.

### **St. Vincent Ferrer – Sermon on the Good Shepherd**

John 10:12-16 Douay translation

12 But the hireling, and he that is not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and flieth: and the wolf catcheth, and scattereth the sheep: 13 And the hireling flieth, because he is a hireling: and he hath no care for the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd; and I know mine, and mine know me. 15 As the Father knoweth me, and I know the Father: and I lay down my life for my sheep. 16 And other sheep I have, that are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice, and there shall be one fold and one shepherd.

Jn 10:14 "I am the good shepherd." Our sermon shall be from the holy gospel of this Sunday. And we shall have many good teachings for the illumination of the mind and reformation of life. But first let the Blessed Virgin be saluted.

The proposed word for a theme and the basis of our sermon is the world of our Lord Jesus Christ speaking of himself saying: "I am the good shepherd," (Jn 10:14). The goodness of this Blessed shepherd toward his sheep, namely of the Christian faithful, is shown in today's holy Gospel in four ways:

First reason, because he buys the sheep dearly [pretiose],

Second, because he keeps them carefully,

Third, because he feeds them abundantly, and

Fourth, because he guards them safely.

#### **BUYS DEARLY**

I say first that Christ as the good shepherd buys his sheep at a great price [pretiose], namely by the price of his blood. He does not get them by stealth or stealing, or by deception, but he buys them for a just price and then some. About this he speaks in the beginning of the gospel, "I am the good shepherd," (Jn 10:14). Reason, because "The good shepherd gives his life," that is his bodily life, "for his sheep," (v. 11). Reason: why he gives such a precious price, is the incomparable value of a soul, because no bodily creature is comparable in value to the soul. Hence, on the scale of divine justice, which is just and fair, if on one side is placed all bodily creatures, namely gold and silver, pearls and elements, sun, moon and all the stars, and on the other side one rational soul, the rational soul would weigh more in value than all the creatures. Authority: "For what does it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul? Or what exchange shall a man give for his soul?" (Mt 16:26), as if he says, not enough. He profits little who loses his soul. If therefore for the redemption of one soul the whole world does not suffice, how much more for all souls? Therefore there was no price sufficient but the blood of Christ, of infinite value, because of its union with divinity. Hence if on the scale of divine justice one side would be all souls, and on the other the least drop of the blood of Christ, the blood of Christ would weigh more in value than all the souls, because of its union with the divinity, nor would any other price able to be paid be sufficient. About this

Scripture says, "Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things as gold or silver, from your vain conversation of the tradition of your fathers: But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb unspotted and undefiled," (1 Pet 1:18-19). Note, "tradition of your fathers," that is of selling. Tell of how our father Adam sold himself and all of mankind for the price of one apple, although he was not bound of which he was to the species, and he himself had been made captive to the devil, his wife and consequently all his children, Authority: "For by whom a man is overcome," for example as in a duel, "of the same also he is the slave," (2 Pet 2:19). Thus Adam and Eve consenting to sin handed themselves over to the devil. If therefore the slaves beget children, the children are also slaves.

But Christ comes, the best merchant from heaven to earth, knowing the value of souls, and he gives not an apple, nor gold, etc., but only his precious blood of inestimable value, which redeems us. Therefore he says, "You have been redeemed," (Cf 1 Pet 1:18). Note "redeemed" [redempti], that is re-purchased [iterum empti]. Thus it is a conclusion of theology that the least drop of the blood of Christ was a price sufficient and more so [superabundans] for redeeming a thousand worlds by virtue of its divinity and infinite charity.

Now think how many drops of blood Christ shed for us. First, while yet a baby in his circumcision. In the first drop he redeemed us. Again in the second, etc. Second, on the night of his passion how many drops of blood did he shed. In Luke 22:44, "And his sweat became as drops of blood, trickling down upon the ground." Each drop would have been a sufficient price. Third, when he was led off to the house of Pilate, etc. Fourth, when he was crowned with thorns, his whole head flowed blood. Fifth, when he was crucified in hands and feet, how many drops of blood were falling on the head of the Virgin Mary. Also how many tears, how many drops of sweat, how many labors when he would go preaching. Thus he does not say you have been bought, but you have been redeemed, that is bought many times over. Therefore the Apostle [Paul]: "In whom we have redemption" he does not say purchase [emptionem], "through his blood, the remission of sins, according to the riches of his grace, which hath superabounded in us," (Eph 1:7-8). See the first reason why Christ is the Good Shepherd, because he buys his sheep at great price [pretiose].

Morally. [Moral sense]. Here one can ponder if the soul is of such great value, and Christ has paid such a price, how everyone ought to value his own soul. How is that man worthy of great reprehension who for some mundane usefulness, or for gaining some earthly good gives his soul to the devil by sinning mortally, because then the soul is sold to the devil for a cheap price of pride or avarice, and so for the other sins. Then the soul already purchased by Christ, you give away for such a vile price.

A story is told about the exceedingly rich merchant who in a transaction puts up all his money, and buys one precious pearl, and gives it to his wife, who places it in her purse, and a certain woman comes by carrying lettuce, and she gives it for some lettuce. Wouldn't you judge her to be stupid, or to have become so? Likewise you would be in this or in such a stupidity. This merchant is Christ who came down from heaven to the

marketplace and the everyday of this world, and bought a most precious pearl, namely the soul, for which he gave all his blood, and gave it to me and to you. The old woman passing by with the lettuce is temptation, saying: "O what a delight, etc." And when you consent to her, then you hand over the pearl to her, that is your soul. When temptation tempts you to vainglory, pride and so of the other sins, then you sell your soul. Or when for a little bribe you swear falsely. Others give [it away] for a little pleasure, like the lustful. Others for a meal or a jug of wine, like gluttons breaking the fast. Others for a little sleep, like the lazy [pigri] when they skip Mass, etc. So scripture says Deut 4: "Keep yourself therefore, and your soul carefully," (v. 9), namely, lest you return to the servitude to the devil. When the merchant returns, i.e. Christ in death, today or tomorrow, what would he say to you? See, therefore, how sins must be avoided. The holy doctor Pope Leo says in his sermon on the Passion of the Lord, "Recognize, O Christian, your dignity, etc.

### KEEPS CAREFULLY

Second, I say, Christ, the Good Shepherd, keeps his sheep carefully. You already see how every lord who has sheep on earth where there are wolves, keeps them well. So Christ does for the Christians lest they be devoured by the wolves of hell. About this he himself speaks in the second part of the gospel. "But the hireling, and he that is not the shepherd," etc. until, "and mine know me," (Jn 10:12-14), where he states the difference between a true shepherd and the hireling.

12 But the hireling, and he that is not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and flieth: and the wolf catcheth, and scattereth the sheep: 13 And the hireling flieth, because he is a hireling: and he hath no care for the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd; and I know mine, and mine know me.

Note how a lord who has sheep in the desert, has two custodians for the sheep, namely the shepherd and a dog against the raiding wolf. So Christ for the custody of his sheep provides two custodians, namely of pastoral ministers. The shepherds are the holy angels. Whence it is a teaching of sacred theology that everyone from the beginning of his birth has an angel commissioned for his protection. About this see Thomas [Aquinas] I, q. 113. Practically speaking. When a woman is about to give birth, Christ in heaven calls an Angel by name, because he have them all names, saying, "I commit to you my son or daughter, keep them," etc. The infant as it is born is first received by the angel into the hands of the angel, that is in its keeping and care, and next to the midwife, however much she is present. From which it follows that a woman never gives birth without a midwife. Jerome says, about these words, "Their," i.e. of men, "angels in heaven always see the face of my Father who is in heaven," (Mt 18:10). Here the Gloss of Jerome says: "How great is the dignity of souls, that each from the moment of their birth would have a good angel assigned to its care." Note, "each." No owner provides a shepherd for each of his sheep, but he commits 100 or 200 to one shepherd. But Christ loves souls so much that he gives to each their shepherd or keeper. See how he cares for his sheep. Think here, etc. If a king would have sheep like David had them in old times, and the other kings, and would say to his soldiers and barons I commit to you these sheep of the desert, that you keep them, how indignant would he be, nor would he have any patience, and the holy angels of whom the least is greater than this Pope, King, or

Emperor, would regard it as an honor for them, that God wished to commit creatures to them whom he made to his image and likeness, and redeemed by his blood and they would thank God. Nor would any angel desert the creature committed to him up until death, whom then, if he be perfect, he would lead to paradise, or to purgatory, or turn him over to the hands of the devils, if he be wicked and impenitent. Of this David, "For he hath given his angels charge over you; to keep you in all your ways," (Ps 90:11). Note, universally "in all," and through the sea and through land, etc.

Morally. You have hear the teaching, when you have some temptation, or occasion of sin, you should think repentance of the angel. No thief would steal when another person is watching, nor a lustful person commit a sin of lust. Think how the angel sees you always, etc. Again, Bernard, "In every corner, and every direction [diversorio] give reverence to the angel, and do not do in his presence what you would not do if I were present.

Second, Christ for keeping his sheep, provides dogs who hunt down the wolves of hell. The dogs are all who have the office of preaching. Demons are more afraid of and are more terrified by the clamor and barking of preaching, than wolves are of the barking of dogs. It is a greater dignity to be such a minister and watchdog – because it is the apostolic office on behalf of the flock of Christ – than to be a patriarch or prophet. Authority: Job in the person of Christ crucified, said, "But now the younger in time scorn me, whose fathers I would not have set with the dogs of my flock," (Job 30:1). Note, "But now," namely in the midst of the passion, "the younger in time scorn me," namely the Jews who were then were, "whose fathers," the patriarchs and prophets, "I would not have set with the dogs of my flock," namely with the apostles, because the apostles were of greater dignity, and the apostolic men, than the patriarchs and the prophets. Note therefore how great is the office of preaching, and with how much vigilance is it to be exercised by manly barking [viriliter latrando]. So David, in Ps 67:23-24, "The Lord said: I will turn them from Basan, I will turn them into the depth of the sea: That your foot may be dipped in the blood of your enemies; the tongue of your dogs be red with the same." Note, "The Lord said: I will turn them," namely, sinners, "from Basan," i.e. from confusion. "I will turn them into the depth of the sea," i.e. by bitter contrition. And how does this happen? David replies, "That your foot," the body, "may be dipped in the blood," of the passion, "and the tongue of your dogs," of the preachers preaching of the passion of Christ, "of your enemies," supply the sheep are freed by him, namely by Christ, and not by virtue of the preaching.

Morally. Nowadays the dogs provided by Christ to keep the sheep, make peace with the wolves of hell. Therefore the sheep are kept badly. Note here the parable of Aesop on the dogs and the wolves wishing to wage war. One old wolf who had seen and heard much said, I ask that before the battle you permit me to speak with the dogs. He said to the dogs, It will be a great evil for you to fight with us, because either you shall be conquered and [not] so good for you, or you will be victorious and if we die you shall lose your livelihood. With us dead they will no longer need you. Hearing this, the dogs changed their minds and made peace. The significance of this parable is good. The wolves are the demons; the dogs, the preachers, who ought to fight but make peace. For

now the preachers are not barking against the demons for the sake of keeping the flock, but as clergy are seen thus: they either have mistresses [familiarites], wealth, etc., and they preach the teachings of the poets and not of Christ. Thus it is already true what Isaiah said: "All you beasts of the field come to devour, all you beasts of the forest. His watchmen are all blind, they are all ignorant: dumb dogs not able to bark, seeing vain things, sleeping and loving dreams. And meet impudent dogs, they never had enough: the shepherds themselves knew no understanding: all have turned aside into their own way, every one after his own gain, from the first even to the last," (Isa 56:9-11). Thus the wolves, that is the demons, devour so many sheep.

If it is said, "It is a wonder that some sheep would perish, because they have a guardian angel," etc., I reply that God through the angels guards the sheep, but does not force free will. Christ commands, the angels however give counsel, and persuade but do not force; Christ as Lord and principal shepherd commands humility, and the angel induces you to the same, but you are so wicked and stubborn in your wickedness etc, that you do not wish to believe Christ commanding, nor the angel counseling, but you wish to act in a proud way and with pomp etc. The same of other virtues and their opposite vices. Behold why the sheep of Christ are lost, because they prefer not to remain under the care or rule of the shepherd. So David: "I have gone astray like a sheep that is lost," (Ps 118:176).

#### FED ABUNDANTLY

I say third, that the goodness of Christ the shepherd is shown in this that he feeds his sheep generously, namely in the sacrament of the altar. It is great when a lord permits his sheep to graze in his garden; greater still when at his table and of his own bread. Christ does more for his sheep, whom he permits to eat in his house, namely the church, and at his table, the altar, where he provides not bread, but his body as food, and his blood as drink, not one piece but his whole body. About this the gospel says, "As the Father knows me, and I know the Father: and I lay down my life for my sheep," (Jn 10:15). Here Gregory comments that he says this about the sacrament of the altar. Christ did what he admonishes, he shows what he commands. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep, that he changes his body and blood into our sacrament, and he feeds the sheep which he has redeemed with the food of his flesh. About this pasture the prophecy of Ezekiel 34, Thus says the Lord, "I will feed [my sheep] in the mountains of Israel ... I will feed them in the most fruitful pastures, and their pastures shall be in the high mountains of Israel," (Ez 34:13,14), namely in the three highest substances which are in the consecrated host. Hence the higher mountain or creature of the corporal world, and better is the body of Jesus Christ which is in the host. Christ said to the apostles at the last supper "Take and eat. This is my body," (Mat 26:24). The second highest mountain better and more excellent than all spiritual creatures is the soul of Christ, which is also there in the consecrated host through natural concomitance. The third highest mountain, because better and more excellent of all liquid substances is the blood of Christ, which is there through natural concomitance. Therefore it is not given to you in the chalice. Also over all bodily and spiritual and liquid creatures is the divinity, which is entirely in the consecrated host. Behold what a haul [qualis bolus]. See why he said? "I will feed my sheep," etc., (Ez 34:15).

Morally. If therefore you wish to be with the angels in the pastures of paradise, receive communion each year at Easter, prepared well for you, otherwise you will not be received in paradise. A great reason is that he who does not wish to receive Christ in his house will not be received by Christ in paradise. "Amen, amen I say unto you: Except you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, you shall not have life in you," (Jn 6:54). But he who receives communion, is received by Christ saying, "It is right, because you have received me, that I receive you into my house." "Well done, good and faithful servant," (Mt 25:21). Note that just as Christ should be received sacramentally each year, so he ought to be received spiritually on each Sunday at Mass. The priest receives him sacramentally, and the whole people ought to receive him spiritually. Thus the priest says in receiving communion, "Refreshed by the heavenly food and drink," etc.

Observing four conditions you should receive Christ at mass spiritually. On Sunday, you first should not drink, 1 Cor 11: "When you come together to eat, wait for one another," namely you should not drink when, etc. Second that you should have been to confession, because when man has invited, always he should have hands washed. David, "We are his people and the sheep of his pasture. Go into his gates, "with praise [in confession]," (Ps 99:3-4). He doesn't say it in the epistle or in the gospel. Third, you should not talk in church. "For thus says the Lord God the Holy One of Israel: If you return and be quiet, you shall be saved: in silence and in hope shall your strength be." (Isa 30:15). Note "if you return," namely from your labors and temporal businesses. Fourth, you shouldn't leave until the blessing is given, according to that of Deut. 32, "Give magnificence to our God. The works of God are perfect."

#### KEEPS SAFE

Fourth, I say that Christ like a good shepherd keeps his sheep safe. Just as a shepherd gathers his sheep into a secure place, etc, so does Christ. About this the fourth part of the gospel: "And other sheep I have, that are not of this fold," (Jn 10:16), to the end. Thus good people I see that you who have sheep in pastures on the mountain, when night comes, you put them in some sheepfold, lest the wolves eat them. So Jesus does with us. When evening comes – the day of our death, Jesus gathers souls into paradise, if they have lived well, lest the wolf, that is the devil devour them. And Christ speaks to the angels saying, "Other sheep I have," men and women, and it is necessary to lead them to me, namely through innocence, or through obedience, or through penitence. The sheepfold, or place of these sheep where in the night of death they might rest most securely is the empyreal heaven, namely the society of the angels, and they make up "one fold and one shepherd," (v. 16).