



Santa Sabina, 5 March 2019

### ***Preach in the manner of the apostles!***

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This command of Christ to Vincent Ferrer, while he was facing a serious illness, expresses his whole life. This call provoked a kind of « conversion » that marked his life as a brother preacher, and made him take a turning point in his preaching, opening his path as a brother preacher with Christ. While, after the celebration of the Jubilee of the Order's confirmation, the memory of the “*Dies natalis*” of Saint Vincent Ferrer is celebrated, this command is today intended for the entire Order. Preaching in the manner of the apostles!

Vincent Ferrer's path to holiness is impressive. When he entered the Order at a young age, he was sufficiently noticed by the brothers that he was entrusted with the ministry of chaplain of the King of Aragon. This position will give him the opportunity to be confronted with the ecclesiastical-political unrest that will mark this troubled period of the double papacy of Rome and Avignon. An opportunity then to affirm a believing, theological and spiritual position with regard to the Church of Christ which should, according to him, like his contemporary Catherine of Siena (*even if they have different positions*) serve unity. Faithful and demanding disciple of Dominic, Vincent the preacher knows that the evangelization of the name of Jesus Christ is rooted in the prayer of the One who asks the Father that all may be one, as the Father and He are one. His theological reflections, his preaching, unceasingly affirm this fundamental dimension of Christian preaching: to live, to love, to pray, to proclaim the Word, surrendering oneself to the One who came, preached, gave one's life, and rose to fulfil this promise of unity of all in God. Was it not this that inspired Saint Dominic's determination to orient his life in a new way, from the lands of Lauragais, to follow and imitate the Galilean preacher and itinerant proclaiming through towns and villages the good news of the Kingdom of God? Go, and preach like the apostles!

And here is Vincent, who, in turn, abandons the spheres of power intrigues to go on the roads of Europe. Spain, Switzerland, France... Tireless preacher of the Gospel, he who would be called « the galley slave of God », went on to preach, accompanied by a group of penitents, passing among his contemporaries doing good, guiding their spiritual life, insisting on the value of poverty and simplicity of life, exhorting them to conversion and to lead a life according to the sweet mercy of God. There are many different ways of speaking about Saint Vincent. The thaumaturgical preacher who is welcomed by introducing him to the sick and infirm, and who invites us to conversion by often evoking the horizon of eschatology: «*Time Deum et date illi honorem*». The austere religious who leads a life of great frugality, prayer and penance who carries in his life and body the trace of this «concern» for the salvation of the world. The spiritual man who encourages us to recognize the power of God's mercy that comes to all, regardless of anything else, to console, heal, strengthen, forgive. The friend of God who does not spare his strength but rather dares, by exhausting his human energy, to welcome into his humanity a strength and a fire that he receives from another, so much greater than himself. It is the radicalness of the commitment of this friend of God, probably as much as the impressive miracle worker, who was immediately recognized by his contemporaries, welcomed by large crowds, and very often chosen in the Order as a model for a preacher, beyond the disagreements that one can have about certain contents of his preaching.

It is indeed this apostle that his contemporaries recognized, during his lifetime and with great fervour after his death. An apostle who wanted to learn from this Order of Preachers, which Pope Honorius confirmed in a letter to Dominic and his brothers: «He who never ceased to make his Church fruitful through new offspring wishes to make these modern times the equal of former days and to spread the Catholic faith. So he inspired you with a holy desire to embrace

Poverty, profess the regular life and commit yourselves to the proclamation of the word of God, preaching everywhere the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.» (LCO 1, § I). It is impressive to see how quickly his reputation for holiness spread to where he had been. It is also impressive to know how much the brothers and sisters of the Order have chosen Saint Vincent Ferrer as patron saint of their province or lay fraternities for some, of so many of their churches, of their projects, of multiple pastoral and evangelization groups. Basically, it is impressive to see how, in the Order, Saint Vincent quickly became, in a way, the « patron saint » of preaching. His Treatise on Spiritual Life, in this sense, is recognized by many as an exposition of what the spiritual life of a brother preacher can and should be.

And this is precisely what makes St Vincent Ferrer relevant today for the Order and for the Church. Vincent who gave his whole life for preaching, invites all the members of the Order of Preachers, through his witness of holiness, to look towards his same horizon. To give one's whole life for the preaching of the Gospel, as did the apostles by following Jesus the preacher and, in so doing, to be led to the source of his life according to the Spirit. This determination and « fatigue » of preaching is what establishes his closeness to the One whose mercy he wants to preach: « I am only a poor broken old man who can no longer do anything, who knows nothing or rather who knows only his ignorance and cowardice. Give me the grace to realize more and more that I am nothing and that you are everything » (Prayer reconstituted in 1954 by Thomas Lacroix). The adventure of preaching is a spiritual adventure. The life of the preacher is called to let himself be carried away by the grace that can make it a « mystical life ». Mystic of a deep compassion, in the image of Christ's compassion, suffering so that the Church does not divide itself and is truly, at the heart of the world, that communion which testifies to the Trinitarian communion. Mystic of the desire to build bridges of fraternity between so many different cultures. Mystic of compassion for the poor, the sick and sinners, because none of them can be excluded from the dream of communion that Christ has made shine in the heart of humanity. Mystic of a given life, to bring to its most incandescent point the fire of desire that « He should grow and I should diminish » Relevancy of a mystic that wishes to give the Word by risking all his life, without restraint and without reserve.

In what way is the holiness of this so beautiful and high figure of our Order of burning relevance today for all of us, sisters and brothers preachers, lay and religious? He presents us with the figure of the preaching, itinerant and compassionate brother.

*Preacher.* Vincent reminds us that we are, above all, preachers, and *preachers in the manner of the apostles*, that is, following and imitating Jesus when he went to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom through towns and villages. It was not a question for Vincent to go on the roads because he had so many things to «say», to « teach » his contemporaries. He wanted to talk to them, because it was for him to make his contemporaries discover that, through his humble words, it was God himself who approached them and wanted to talk to them. Preaching does not consist in talking to people «on God's behalf», but rather in talking to people about God who comes and would like to talk to them. Is it not, finally, this movement that founds the Church? To address the people and, as Dominic would have said one day to his companions, above all to pray for those we meet, so that we may understand them and so that a true and fraternal conversation can be established with them.

*Itinerant.* It is this desire to follow and imitate Jesus the preacher that makes him go on the roads, to join other cultures, to be willing to encounter other languages. St Vincent travelled tirelessly throughout Europe until the end of his life, without sparing his strength. A desire driven by the conviction that, beyond the distinctions of languages, cultures, races and history, there exists at the

heart of this diversity a fundamental unity, a communion that constitutes the essential capacity of humanity. So many diversities today, so many divisions, and sometimes conflicts. Take the road, and join our contemporaries in the name of the same «address» intended for them: « they are my people and I am their God ». Following Vincent, the Order is once again invited to, a geographical, cultural and intellectual itinerancy. The spiritual fire that can animate this apostolic itinerancy is the determination to become preachers by allowing ourselves to be taken away from ourselves, from our security, from our 'comfort zones', from our well-established mentalities. «Let us go on to the next town, that I may preach there also, for that is why I came out.» (Mk 1:30). Of Dominic, it was said that he was constantly concerned about joining the Cumans. What are our concerns today?

*Compassionate.* This desire must be first and foremost imbued with a powerful compassion for those who suffer. Because they are the sign of the truth of the human being. Of his suffering, certainly. Of his sin, sometimes. But above all, the capacity of humans to mutually support each other in the trial of suffering, to share among themselves the weight of suffering to such an extent that it disappears and can be transformed into the joy of vulnerable solidarity. Like Dominic, Vincent experiences how compassion provokes him to preach, at the same time as he invites him and leads him to be close, and brother, to those who hope for consolation. Vincent the thaumaturge certainly impressed the crowds, and his miracles were probably a cause of his great reputation. But were the crowds not equally struck by this ability to welcome « in the fire of charity » those who, sick, infirm, suffering, banished from society for various reasons, suffered from the experience of being in exile. Compassion that thus inscribes the preaching of the Gospel in the founding history of the liberation of the people chosen by God. Is there not a light of this kind to guide the discernments that, in many places, we have to make to determine the priorities, the places and the manners of the service of the Order to evangelization?

If Saint Vincent Ferrer were to be recognized as a doctor of the Church, it would undoubtedly be because of this passion for preaching, rooted in the contemplation of the Word and animated by the desire that radiates the mystery of the Church, the Body of Christ. In a way, he teaches the Church in the same manner that, seven centuries later, in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI taught the Church: *Evangelii nuntiandi*. The Church establishes itself, that is, at the same time discovers the mystery that is at its origin and gradually unfolds its grace, as it asserts itself, in the image of the first apostolic community, as a community of brothers and sisters, « missionary disciples » (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 120). The Church exists to evangelize (*Evangelii nuntiandi*, 14). The mystery of the Trinitarian communion that founds the Church is revealed through the proclamation of the one truth. The grace of the preacher is to try, through his poor human words, to unveil this mystery and to convoke, in his name, unity. Thus was Vincent. He is a doctor in that he teaches, through the commitment of all the energy of his life in preaching, that, for the Church, preaching is about meeting the unity of God's love for his people, the unity constituted by the Spirit, a unity for which Jesus wanted to give his life. It teaches the Church how the itinerancy of preaching is the path on which the Church receives the grace of being configured as the living Body of Christ. And this configuration is the mystery that calls him to preach, not in a proud and severe way as a judge would be, but from the womb of charity that corrects with patience and trust, that guides paternal compassion when it unreservedly welcomes the prodigal son, that consoles his children with the sweet tenderness of a mother. A doctor of preaching, Vincent Ferrer is that, by teaching the Church how it can preach, as long as it humbly disposes itself to let Christ proclaim the Kingdom within it.

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