

ST. VINCENT FERRER
(1350 – 1419)

St. Vincent Ferrer was born at Valencia, in Spain on the 23rd of January, 1350. Excitement foreshadowed the child's birth. His mother, Constance, experienced only joy and painlessness during her expectancy; furthermore, his father had a prophetic dream in which an unknown Dominican preacher appeared to him and told him that he would have a son whose fame would be world-renowned. Also, a poor blind woman predicted that the child Constance bore within her was an "angel who would one day restore her sight" – which he did years later. St. Vincent brought with him into the world a happy disposition for learning and piety, which improved from his cradle by study and a good education. In order to subdue his passions, he fasted rigorously from his childhood every Wednesday and Friday. The passion of Christ was always the object of his most tender devotion. The Blessed Virgin he ever honored as his spiritual mother. Looking on the poor as the members of Christ, he treated them with the greatest affection and charity, which caused his parents to make him dispenser of their bountiful alms. His father having proposed to him the choice of a religious state, an ecclesiastical, or a secular state, Vincent without hesitation said it was his earnest desire to consecrate himself to the service of God in the Order of St. Dominic. His good parents with joy conducted him to a convent of that Order in Valencia, and he put on the habit in 1368, in the beginning of his eighteenth year.

He made a surprisingly rapid progress in the paths of perfection, taking St. Dominic for his model. To the exercises of prayer and penance, he joined the study and meditation of the Holy Scriptures and the readings of the Fathers. For three years, he read only the scriptures and knew the whole Bible by heart. Soon after his solemn profession, he was appointed to read lectures of philosophy, and, at the end of his course, published a treatise on Dialectic Suppositions, being not quite twenty-four years old. He was then sent to Barcelona, where he continued his scholastic exercises, and at the same time preached the word of God with great fruit, especially during a great famine, when he foretold the arrival of two vessels loaded with corn the same evening to relieve the city, which happened, contrary to all expectation. From thence he was sent to Lerida, the most famous university of Catalonia. There, continuing his apostolic functions and education, he received his doctorate, receiving the cap from the hands of Cardinal Peter de Luna, legate of Pope Clement VII, in 1378, being twenty-eight years of age. At the earnest requests of the bishop, clergy and the people of Valencia, he was recalled to his own country, and pursued there both his lectures and his preaching with such extraordinary reputation, so manifestly attended with the benediction of the Almighty, that he was honored in the whole country above what can be expressed. As a humiliation, God permitted an angel of Satan to molest him with violent temptations of the flesh, and to fill his imagination with filthy ideas. The arms which the saint employed against the devil were prayer, penance, and a perpetual watchfulness over every impulse of his passions. As he grew into manhood it was said that his countenance was beautiful and radiant, which reflected the beauty of a soul filled with the love of God. Even in his old age, this radiance never left him. He was most radiant, however, when he gave a sermon on the Mother of God or the joys of Heaven. He was firmly devoted to the Passion and enjoyed a childlike devotion to Mary, which included a faithful observance of praying the Angelus. His heart was always fixed on God and he made his studies, labor, and all his actions a continued prayer. The same practice he proposes to all Christians in his book entitled, *A Treatise on a Spiritual Life*, in which he writes thus: *"Do you desire to study to your advantage? Let devotion accompany all your studies and study less to make yourself learned than to become a saint."*

Consider some of the phrases in this marvelous book. *"What is meritorious is not that a man should be poor, but that, being poor, he should love poverty."* *"A vain question deserves nothing but silence. So **learn to be silent for a time**; you will edify your brethren and silence will teach you to speak when the hour is come."* *"Regard yourself as more vile and miserable in the sight of God because of your faults than any sinner whatever, no matter what his sins... and consider closely that any grace or inclination to good or desire of virtue you may have, is not of yourself but of the sole mercy of Christ."* *"Try to convince yourself that there is no crime-laden sinner but would have served God better than you... if he had received the same graces."* ***"Once humility is acquired, charity will come to life – a burning flame devouring the corruption of vice and filling the heart so full that there is no place for vanity."***

Missionary Travels

Before the end of the year 1392, St. Vincent being forty-two years old, set out from Avignon towards Valencia. He preached in every town with wonderful efficacy; and the people having heard him in one place followed him in crowds to others. Public usurers, blasphemers, debauched women, and other hardened sinners everywhere were induced by his

discourses to embrace a life of penance. He converted a great number of Jews and Mohammedans, heretics and schismatics. He visited every province of Spain in this manner, except Galicia. He went thence into Italy, preaching on the coasts of Genoa, in Lombardy, Piedmont, and Savoy, as he did in part of Germany, about the Upper Rhine and through Flanders. Numerous wars and the unhappy great schism in the Church had been productive of a multitude of disorders in Christendom; gross ignorance and a shocking corruption of manners prevailed in many places, whereby the teaching of this zealous apostle, who, like another Boanerges, preached in a voice of thunder, became not only useful but even absolutely necessary, to assist the weak and alarm the sinner. The ordinary subjects of his sermons were sin, death, God's judgments, hell, and eternity. He delivered his discourses with so much energy that he filled the most insensible with terror. A great number of his sermons have come down to us, some in Latin and many in the vernacular. By them one seizes the man and the saint to the life. They are masterpieces of naturalness, intelligence, picturesqueness and, at moments, poetry. In their kind there is nothing better. And they all develop one same theme.

First of all, there is sin as he had known it in the world under its seven root forms, stripped of all its pretenses and of its false promises of delight. After that comes penance, which can drive out sin or at least dull the sharpness of its edge, fortifying us against sin's assaults and uniting with the Blood of Christ to plead for us before the Throne of God. Finally is the Judgment with its alternative for those who have done evil – Purgatory or Hell. That inevitable judgment, which awaits each one of us in the moment of death, he made concrete and dramatic by building it into one thing with the terrible picture of the universal Judgment, the Last Judgment, when Christ will appear on the clouds of heaven to summon the living and the dead to that damnation or glory. He showed it in all its splendor, all its horror – in that light which is beatitude or torment, which ravishes the soul or burns it without end. Punishment is certain; punishment is at hand. It is coming towards us relentlessly. Every day we live brings it one day closer. It may be upon us in an hour, in a second. He felt it so and he made sinners tremble with the feeling. He returned to this theme frequently and on great occasions. "Yes," you will say, "he wanted to frighten them." He did indeed want to frighten them because he himself was afraid. And as his fear for himself grew less, his fear for them grew greater. Not, alas, that he believed himself just. How could he when he still had life before him and might still, therefore, fail? And if he failed that day? What if God held him responsible for the sins of his brethren because he had not succeeded in raising and fortifying them in virtue?

At his sermons he was frequently obliged to stop to give leisure for the sobs and sighs of the congregation. His sermons were not only pathetic, but were also addressed to the understanding and supported with a wonderful strength of reasoning and the authorities of scriptures and fathers, which he perfectly understood and employed as occasion required. His gift of miracles and the sanctity of his penitential life gave to his words the greatest weight. Amidst these journeys and fatigues, he never ate flesh; fasted every day except Sundays, and on Wednesdays and Fridays he lived on bread and water, which course he held for forty years; He lay on straw or small twigs. He spent a great part of the day in the confessional, with incredible patience, and there finished what he had begun in the pulpit. We have the testimony of John of Plascenia, who was with him for some time, that he read souls like an open book.

He had with him five friars of his Order and some other priests to assist him. Though by his sermons thousands were moved to give their possessions to the poor, he never accepted anything himself and was no less scrupulous in cultivating in his heart the virtue and spirit of obedience than that of poverty, for which reason he declined accepting any dignity in the church or superiority in his Order. He labored thus nearly twenty years, until 1417, in Spain, Majorca, Italy, and France. During this time, preaching in Catalonia, among other miracles, he restored the use of his limbs to John Soler, a crippled boy, judged by the physicians incurable, who afterwards became a very eminent man and Bishop of Barcelona. In the year 1400 he was at Aix, in Provence, and, in 1401, he was in Piedmont and the neighboring parts of Italy, being honorably received in the obedience of each pope. Returning into Savoy and Dauphine, he found there a valley called Valpute, or Valley of Corruption, in which the inhabitants were abandoned to cruelty and shameful lusts. He joyfully exposed his life among these abandoned wretches, converted them all from their errors and vices, and changed the name of the valley to Valpur, or Valley of Purity, which name it ever after retained. He preached two or three times every day, preparing his sermons while he was on the road. He worked for three months, traveling from village to village and from town to town in Dauphine announcing the word of God, making a longer stay in three valleys in the diocese of Embrun, namely, Lucerna, Argenteya, and Valpute, having converted almost all the heretics which peopled those parts. Being invited in the most pressing manner into Piedmont, he, for thirteen months, preached and instructed the people there, in Montserrat and the valleys, and brought to the Faith a multitude of Vaudois and other heretics. He says that the general source of their heresy was ignorance and want of an instructor, and cries out, "*I blush and tremble when I consider the terrible judgment impending on ecclesiastical superiors who live at their ease in rich palaces, while so many souls redeemed*

by the Blood of Christ are perishing. I pray without ceasing the Lord of the harvest that He send good workmen into His harvest." He adds that he had in the valley of Luferia converted a heretical bishop by a conference, extirpated a certain infamous heresy in the valley Pontia, converted the country into which the murderers of St. Peter, the martyr, had fled, reconciled the Guelphs and Gibelins, and settled a general peace in Lombardy. Being called back into Piedmont by the bishops and lords of that country, he stayed five months in the dioceses of Aoust, Tarentaise, St. John of Morienne and Grenoble. He says he was then at Geneva, where he had abolished a very inveterate superstitious festival – a thing the bishop dared not attempt – and was going to Lausanne, being called by the bishop to preach to many idolaters who adored the sun and to heretics, who were obstinate, daring, and very numerous on the frontiers of Germany.

Conversions of the Moors and Jews

The saint was honored with the gift of tongues. Preaching in his own, he was understood by men of different languages, which is affirmed by Lanzano, who says that Greeks, Germans, Sardes, Hungarians, and people of other nations declared they understood every word he spoke, though he preached in Latin or his mother tongue, as spoken at Valencia. There is another marvelous fact which is beyond normal explanation. However far away people might be, everyone heard every syllable. He could make himself heard literally about three miles away, when it was of importance that he should be heard. He also worked many wonders through the Sign of the Cross and through the Holy Name of Jesus. He warned lazy Christians who sloppily made a circular sign of the Cross that they were using a sign of the Devil instead!

The Moorish king had heard of him; the multitude of his miracles was startling, and for a good Moslem, upsetting. He could not get Vincent out of his head. Finally he decided he must see the man who worked the miracles. He sent for him. The saint arrived lame from a great sore in the leg and rode on his moth-eaten old donkey through all the splendors of the Alhambra grounds under the fixed stare of the marble lions. The King wanted to hear him preach. That in itself was a revolution. They murmured, they listened, and doubtless they understood though he spoke no Arabic. For, after three sermons, eight thousand Moors asked for baptism. Some of the nobles, fearing the total subversion of their religion, obliged the king to dismiss him. He then labored in the kingdom of Aragon and again in Catalonia, especially in the diocese of Gironne and Vich; in a borough of the latter, he renewed the miracle of the multiplication of loaves, related at length in his life. At Barcelona, in 1409, he foretold to Martin, King of Aragon, the death of his son, Martin, the King of Sicily, who was snatched away in the middle of his triumphs in the month of July. Vincent comforted the afflicted father and persuaded him to a second marriage to secure the public peace by an heir to his crown.

He cured innumerable sick everywhere and, at Valencia, made a dumb woman speak but told her she should ever remain dumb and that this was for the good of her soul, charging her always to praise and thank God in spirit, to which instructions she promised obedience. He converted the Jews in great numbers in the diocese of Valencia, in the kingdom of Leon, as Mariana relates. It is difficult to arrive at a figure. The most cautious of his historians give twenty-five thousand converts among the Jews and eight thousand among the Moors. *"You know,"* Vincent announced from the pulpit, *"that we have good news. All the Jews and many of the Moors of Valladolid are converted."* There was similar news from Toledo, Huesca, Saragossa... This was after the Congress of Tortosa for the conversion of Israel, suggested to Benedict by a former rabbi, Josua Holuorqui, who had become Friar Jerome of the Holy Faith. It met in 1414 and was the occasion of interminable arguments – sixty-seven sessions – between rabbis and religious. Vincent, who took part in the Congress, collaborated in a Treatise on the Jews which served as a base for his further labors among them; in it all the proofs of the Dogma of the Incarnation were magisterially set forth. The Pope presided. The populace were massed on the river bank; Master Vincent had taken up his stand to preach on the roof of a house surrounded by trees on the far side of the Ebro. One day he stopped suddenly in his sermon. The people were startled. *"Do not be shocked by this interval,"* he said, *"I must wait upon grace."* As the crowd began to laugh, a party of Jews were seen approaching: Grace had conquered them. Of sixteen rabbis, fourteen were converted. How he loved these new children of his; he loved to remind Christians who too readily forgot the fact that Jesus and Mary were of the Jewish race.

He was invited to Pisa, Sienna, Florence and Lucca in 1409, whence, after having reconciled the dissensions that prevailed in those parts, he was recalled by John II, King of Castille. In 1411, he visited the kingdoms of Castille, Leon, Murcia, Andalusia, Asturias and other countries; in all of these places the power of God was manifested in His enabling him to work miracles and effect the conversion of an incredible number of Jews and sinners. The Jews of Toledo, embracing the faith, changed their synagogue into a church under the name of Our Lady's. From Valladolid, the saint went to Salamanca in the beginning of the year 1412. There he met a procession with a bier and the corpse of a man who had been murdered. In the presence

of a great multitude, he commanded the deceased to arise and the dead man instantly revived. For a monument of this miracle a wooden cross was erected and is yet to be seen on the spot. In the same city, the saint entered the Jewish synagogue with a cross in his hand. Filled with the Holy Ghost, he made so moving a sermon that the Jews, who were at first surprised, all desired baptism at the end of his discourse and changed their synagogue into a church to which they gave the title of the Holy Cross.

Extraordinary Miracles

As a good Dominican, Master Vincent loved to proclaim the all-powerfulness of the Rosary. "*Who observes this practice*," he said, "*is beyond the reach of adversity*." He told the case of a very pious merchant who would say the rosary from morning to night, even to the neglect of his business. One day he was captured by brigands and, knowing that his hour was come, he humbly asked for a little moment to pray. Hardly had he begun when the Blessed Virgin came to him accompanied by St. Catherine carrying a tray of roses and St. Agnes with a needle and a ball of thread. The brigands, needless to say, opened their eyes wide. At each Ave the prisoner recited, the Blessed Virgin took a rose from the plate, pierced it with the needle, slipped it on to the thread. Thus, she made a wreath which she placed on the prisoner's brow. As he happened to have his eyes closed, he did not see the wreath, but he smelt its fragrance. The Virgin and the two saints went off and the merchant offered them his neck, saying, "*Now you can strangle me*." "*Strangle you?*" said the brigands. "*Who were those beautiful women? You must be a holy man; remember us in your prayers*." Then they restored his goods and went away converted. When he spoke of the Mother of Men, Vincent was transfigured. He used to tell the case of a schoolboy who wanted at all costs to see her. An angel warned him that if he did so, he would lose an eye. He accepted and lost an eye. Then he asked to see her again, though it meant the loss of the other eye, which also took place. But when he was thus completely blind, the Blessed Virgin restored both eyes.

The people had recourse to him in every difficulty: The smallest villages fought to have him. In one place they took his hat, which assured pregnant women of a safe and easy delivery; in others, he drove away a cloud of grasshoppers and a whole army of weevils with holy water. Once he came to the point of utter exhaustion. He could go no further. And heaven came to his aid. In the very heart of a wild lonely forest an excellent hotel appeared suddenly from nowhere to shelter him; leaving it the next day, he happened to forget his hat. One of the penitents went back to the inn to get it, but there was no inn – the hat was hanging on the branch of a tree at the very spot where the inn had stood. The following year he came to Murcia. According to the Bishop's report, which has come down to us, almost no one remained untouched by the grace of the Spirit that filled all the air. In that province there was an end for that time of gambling, debauchery, conspiracy, quarreling, and murder. How could anyone fail to follow the example of a Moor who promised to embrace the faith if the pyre he had lighted in the main square was extinguished at Vincent's prayer? Vincent prayed; the flames went out.

"*It is an immense enterprise*," as one historian has noted, "*to write a life of which every incident was a miracle*." Yes, everything in that life, ordinary things as well as extraordinary, was touched with miracles, and the greatest miracle in his life was that life itself, in its daily texture, was so burdened, toil-filled, and various; so continuously under fire, yet so steady and undeviating – in the midst of schism, in the midst of anarchy, under the sulfurous illumination of the Last Judgment, which tragic coming his own life may very well have helped to postpone. Consider the framework of his days. He rose usually at two in the morning for the night office, recited his psalms, prayed, meditated, went to confession – each morning – and scourged himself, thus purging his soul and chastising his body. Mass was at six o'clock, then three hours preaching, visits to the sick, mediations between parties in lawsuits and families at odds, final words of advice to souls he had just converted or brought back to grace: Then once more on the road. Picture him on the road: In rain or sunshine, his feet in wooden stirrups attached to the saddle by cords which cut into his legs, the unending dust from the trampling of the crowd, the chanting of psalms and the never ending crunch of feet, and the incidents and the accidents and the care he must have for all his vast company. There was one meal a day – soup and a tiny piece of fish, washed down with wine liberally watered. He never had an evening meal. Then he arrives at the next village to be won to our Lord, the next town to be set in order. The usual tumult and acclamations and idle questions and plain annoyances besieged him – clipping pieces out of his habit, kissing his hands – and everybody taking possession of him – a hundred people if there were a hundred, a thousand if there were a thousand, more if there were more, as many as there might be. Then there was the usual platform where he must say in the evening what he had said in the morning, differently phrased but just as fresh and convincing, and the usual miracles which he must always be asking of God when his eloquence gained nothing or not enough – for unless it gained everything, there always remained something still to gain: God must attend to it – and that meant miracles. The crowd was at last disposed of, but, before going to bed – five hours sleep, never more, and no siesta,

not even in Spain – he still had to make his meditation, get his office said, instruct and direct his companions, prepare tomorrow's sermons, deal with his post, get off answers to bishops, princes, city magistrates, directors of confraternities, priors of convents, the Pope himself and any number of mere nuisances – on every conceivable subject, by no means always concerned with religion. And, in addition, you should reckon the time he loved to devote to religious ceremonies – for he was a convinced liturgist and would have his ceremonies as correct and as magnificent as possible. This gives some idea of the routine of his days – week after week, month after month, for twenty years. And he held and did not break. He said one day to a group of priests, *"The moment you wake, to God's work! Identify yourselves with Christ. At such an hour, He was brought before Pilate, at such an hour the Jews cried out against Him, at such another hour, He gave up the ghost."*

That indeed was the secret of his own resistance. We may be certain that he followed to the letter the precious counsel he gave others, followed it hour by hour exactly, passionately and simply. Living the passion of Christ in his body, heart and mind, he found all things came easily; almost pleasantly. Christ was the other self within him: His words, works, sufferings, flowed as freely from Christ as his miracles. Hence the humility that lived within his awareness of his greatness; hence his patience against all the difficulties of life, all the trials of faith, and all the disappointments of Charity; hence the superabundance of gifts which on the human plane overflowed in achievement and on the divine plane blazed forth in miracles.

He came one time to the bedside of a sinner, to assist him in his last agony. The sinner clung to the saint; he felt that his tardy remorse, his imperfect contrition, his absence of penance, were insufficient to save him unless St. Vincent threw the whole of himself into the scale. He begged Vincent to make over to him a good share of the treasures of grace he had compiled. The saint had pity on his despair. He said: *"I give God all my merits to be applied to you."* *"Is that true?"* The dying man was mistrustful: He did not know that what a saint says is definite. *"Then write it down for me on a slip of paper."* The saint cheerfully did what he was asked and the man died clutching his precious document. Logically, Vincent had nothing left – he must begin to pile up another lot of graces to himself. But a few days later, while he was preaching, a paper whirled in the air above the heads of the crowd, like a dead leaf blown along by the wind. Finally it settled on the preacher's cloak. I need not tell you what it was. God had decided to pay for the sinner's salvation in a different coin. He returned Vincent his merits along with his check. For you never lose by the gift of one's self unless you only half give it.

Whoever approached Vincent felt something about him, like the hot breath of a hidden fire. So it was with the boy at Caen, possessed by devils from the day when a careless barber had pierced a tumor. The boy had lost the use of speech, did not eat or drink, and had no bodily motions except the blood that spurted from his nostrils whenever he was angered. If they beat him, he felt nothing. He grew physically, but in a frightful solitude of a human being who knew no human contact or communication, nor pain nor pleasure. Then Vincent came to him and touched him. *"What do you feel, my son?"* he asked. And the child, set free of what had possessed him, cried: *"Father, I feel God's good pleasure which is accomplished at this moment."* God's good pleasure passed through that hand which He never withheld.

At Pampeluna, they had just condemned an innocent man to death. Vincent pleaded for him in vain. As he was being led to the scaffold, they passed a corpse being taken to burial on a stretcher. Vincent suddenly addressed the corpse: *"You who have no longer anything to gain by lying, is this man guilty? Answer me!"* The dead man sat up and affirmed, *"He is not."* Then Vincent, to reward him for that service, offered the dead man, who was settling down again on the stretcher, to give him back the burden of earthly life. *"No, Father,"* he replied, *"for I am assured of salvation."* And he went off to sleep again and was carried to the cemetery.

There is another episode stranger still if not more marvelous. It happened at Gerona. In the thick of the crowd stood a man somber, glowering, rage stamped on every feature: Near him was his wife with an infant in her arms, still at the breast. The man was devoured by a frenzy of jealousy. Brother Vincent saw him, saw what fire burned in him, and preached upon Jealousy. Suddenly he turned to the man. *"You doubt your wife's faithfulness, do you not? You think this child is not yours? Well, watch!"* Then he cried in a great voice to the child: *"Embrace your father!"* The infant stirred, stood upright, turned towards the man and held out its arms. And thus was the man cured and the family peace restored.

It seems that he touched each heart at the point he chose, the point that charity suggested to him, and invariably at the precise moment. He knew for example that a shepherd in the heart of the mountains had so great confidence in him that he came to hear him, leaving his flock, only staying to draw a circle round them with his staff – counting on the saint to see that the sheep did not go out of the circle or the wolves come into it. Vincent knew it, whether he had guessed it or read it

in the man's eyes; or perhaps God revealed to him the poor shepherd's naive arrangement and let him know that He meant to grant his prayer. At any rate, Vincent told him before all the crowd: "*Your sheep are safe; God is watching over them.*" Similarly, we are told that mothers did not hesitate to leave their babies to come to his sermons: They confided the infants to the angels – as Vincent advised them to. He doubted nothing, this man – God least of all.

There was the very famous miracle of the wine cask which would not run dry while the crowd of Vincent's followers still needed to drink. It is worth adding that ten years later, the owner of the cask, the Seigneur Saint-Just, met a man who gave evidence in the canonization process and assured him that in all those years he had given that miraculous wine to the sick: That no matter what their malady, they were cured: That the wine grew no less though he drew from the cask every day. It would seem that charity once installed in that cask was unwilling to leave it. Charity indeed he left behind him everywhere, impregnating everything he touched. Once, for lack of alms – his purse being empty – he gave a poor woman his hat. "*Thank you... But what do you expect me to do with it?*" Anyhow she took it away with her and that evening, at the gates of Valencia, it struck her to put it on the head of an inn-keeper who was unwilling to give her lodging. He was in an evil temper, having a raging headache. "*Perhaps Master Vincent's hat will cure it.*" It did. The inn-keeper put it aside to use when the need should arise again. The hat was to be seen for long after but in a pitiable condition – for he had had the notion of soaking it in water from time to time and it seems that this incredible hat-broth had cured his customers of all sorts of minor ailments.

Sometimes one asks oneself if it is possible to believe, so enormous are some of the things we are told he did. The miracle at Morella, for instance, is an exact reproduction of the famous miracle of St. Nicholas when he brought back to life the three children in the salting-tub. One is tempted to think that some unscrupulous biographer made the whole thing up. Here is the story. There was a certain woman of great virtue but subject to attacks of nerves, which came very close to madness. One day, in the absence of her husband who had the preacher lodged in the house and had gone out to hear him preach, her mental affliction came upon her and she cut her small son's throat. She then went on to chop him up and roasted a portion of him. This she gave to her husband on his return from listening to the sermon. The man found out somehow what had happened, and at the last point of horror and disgust, rushed out to tell the saint. Vincent realized at once that heaven could not have allowed a happening so monstrous save as an occasion for a most signal manifestation of God's power. He came, prayed, gathered together the bleeding pieces of the child and said to the father, "*If you have faith, God who created this little soul from nothing can bring him back to life.*" He fell on his knees and the impossible happened. The child was alive again, whole and entire.

Consider the story of the two men consumed at Zamora. These were two criminals before whom Master Vincent preached for three hours in the presence of an enormous crowd. We know that he brought them to such a horror of their crime, depicted with such cruel and gripping realism the flames of hell, that when the guards came to bring them back to prison they found only two charred corpses. Remorse – and, we may hope, repentance – had literally consumed them. They were buried in front of the steeple beneath two stones which stood for centuries to attest the fact. One day a Portuguese man who passed that way and to whom the story was told, shrugged his shoulders skeptically. "*I will believe it,*" he cried, "*when one of the immense stones splits.*" He tapped one with the toe of his boot and it split clean in two from top to bottom. Since that is the story we are told, why not? At any rate, when you are dealing with miracles, do not commit the vulgarity of dragging in the question of likelihood.

Yes, the blind see; the deaf hear; paralytics walk; the plague-stricken are healed; the faithless believe; sinners repent; the unstable grow steadfast; the idle find energy; sworn enemies embrace; the hard of heart find their hearts on fire. And beside the miracles that affect men, storms are stilled, rain stops, rocks are split, lightning flashes from the sky. Heaven itself opens and saints, angels, the Mother of God and her Son come forth. What must be must be – God will have it so. The prayer of a saint is omnipotent – if God decides to grant it. "Christ can do nothing," cried an obstinate sinner in Brothers Vincent's face. "*I shall lose my soul if I please.*" There was the claim of human liberty. "*I shall save you by Him, in spite of yourself,*" replied the preacher. There was the claim of the omnipotence of a redemption purchased by the blood of God. Vincent leaned over the crowd. "*Say the Rosary!*" The Creed was said and the Our Father. The Hail Marys followed one another on the beads. From Heaven, thus stormed by prayer, the Virgin Mother in person descended, holding in her arms the Child Jesus – sobbing. At that sight the sinner broke down, surrendered. The will for evil was conquered without a struggle by the will of Grace.

Last Years

Normandy and Brittany were the theater of the apostle's labors the two last years of his life. He was then so worn out and weak that he was scarce able to walk a step without help; yet no sooner was he in the pulpit but he spoke with as much strength, ardor, eloquence, and unction as he had done in the vigor of his youth. He restored to health on the spot one that had been bedridden eighteen years, in the presence of a great multitude, and wrought innumerable other miracles, amongst which we may reckon as the greatest the conversion of an incredible number of souls. He inculcated everywhere a detestation of lawsuits, swearing, lying and other sins, especially of blasphemy.

As his health started failing, his companions persuaded him to return to his own country. Accordingly he set out with that view, riding on an ass, as was his ordinary manner of traveling in long journeys. But after they were gone, as they imagined, a considerable distance, they found themselves again near the city of Vannes. Wherefore the saint perceiving his illness increase, determined to return into the town, saying to his companions that God had chosen that city for the place of his burial. The joy of the city was incredible when he appeared again, but it was allayed when he told them he had come, not to continue his ministry among them, but to look for his grave. These words, joined with a short exhortation which he made to impress on the people's mind their duty to God, made many shed tears, and threw all into an excess of grief. His fever increasing, he prepared himself for death by exercises of piety and devoutly receiving the sacraments. On the third day the bishop, clergy, magistrates, and part of the nobility made him a visit. He conjured them to maintain zealously what he had labored to establish amongst them, exhorted them to perseverance in virtue, and promised to pray for them when he should be before the throne of God, saying he should go to the Lord after ten days. His prayer and union with God he never interrupted. The magistrates sent a deputation to him, desiring he would choose the place of his burial. They were afraid his Order, which had then no convent in Vannes, would deprive the city of his remains. The saint answered that, being an unprofitable servant and a poor religious man, it did not become him to direct anything concerning his burial; however, he begged they would preserve peace after his death, as he always inculcated to them in his sermons, and that they would be pleased to allow the prior of the convent of his Order which was the nearest to that town to have the disposal of the place of his burial. He continued his aspirations of love, contrition, and penance; and often wished the departure of his soul from its fleshy prison, that it might the more speedily be swallowed up in the ocean of all good. On the tenth day of his illness he caused the passion of our Savior to be read to him, and after that recited the penitential psalms, often stopping totally absorbed in God. It was on Wednesday in Passion Week, the 5th of April, that he slept in the Lord, in the year 1419. When he expired a host of little white butterflies fluttered around his head. These were little "angels" to take the Angel of Judgment home and to attest to his purity and holiness. There was even a "piercingly sweet odor" which arose from his body. Joan of France, daughter of King Charles VI, Duchess of Brittany, washed his corpse with her own hands. God showed innumerable miracles by that water and by the saint's habit, girdle, instruments of penance, and other relics, of which the details may be read in the Bollandists.

The death of St. Vincent Ferrer did not check the flowing of the spring which his merits and penances and love had opened in the rock of Mercy inexhaustible. They laid two corpses in his tomb before they sealed it. Just as the touch of his habit wrought miracles during his life, so did the touch of his grave: two dead people were brought to life when placed upon it! Nor is that an isolated incident. The inquiry set on foot at Vannes for the process of his canonization brought to light an incredible mass of miraculous happenings, sudden conversions, cures, apparitions, and a surprising number of resurrections from the dead. Falls, drownings, murderous assaults, illnesses – he intervened in all and was always being invoked.

Petition for his canonization was universal and immediate from kings, bishops, universities, nobles and peasantry. Pope Nicholas V issued a bull to inquire into the life, heroic sanctity and miracles of Saint Vincent. The Duke of Brittany even levied a tax to defray expenses for the process.

According to Vincent's own prophecy, Alphonsus Borgia who was elected to the Papacy and became Callixtus III, did indeed canonize him. The canonization was held on the feast of Saints Peter and Paul, June 29, 1455, in the Dominican Church of Rome, Santa Maria Sopra Minerva. The body was found to be incorrupt on that day. During the Mass of canonization, two dead persons were covered with the cloak in which Saint Vincent had been buried. They were both restored to life. Also, the Duke of Brittany's relative was cured of leprosy that day and a blind man was restored to sight.

Fifty years after St. Vincent's death, a boy of twelve, Juan de Zuniga, died at Placenzia. A prayer to St. Vincent brought him back to life. He lived to be Cardinal Archbishop of Seville. A cathedral was built in commemoration of the event. On the

day they were celebrating the Saint's feast, the preacher failed to appear – he had suddenly fallen ill. The embarrassment would have been serious only that a Dominican father, absolutely unknown, appeared from nowhere and offered to take his place. He went up into the pulpit, preached and was seen no more. It was St. Vincent Ferrer, naturally, since he is always present upon earth, in action if not in person. There seems to be no other possible explanation of the sudden appearance and disappearance of the preacher.

During his life Saint Vincent freed more than seventy people from the Devil and many more were freed at his tomb. He raised more than twenty-eight people from the dead and four hundred sick people were cured by resting on the couch where he had lain during his illness.

The change of a sinful heart is even a greater miracle than wondrous temporal benefits. Saint Vincent was not wanting here as we have seen; thousands of sinners became penitent, including Jews and Moors.

Wherein was the great success of this humble, friar-preacher? First, he was a living image of the Crucified. He was gentle and patient and never murmured a word of complaint. He loved poverty and his purity consisted in excluding all thoughts that did not tend towards God. He preserved this awesome purity by obedience. As great as he was, he excelled more than anyone in submitting to his superiors. Second, he was an imitator of his spiritual father, Saint Dominic. It was said of Saint Dominic that he was "*a light of the word, a dazzling reflection of Jesus Christ, a rose of patience, another precursor and a master in the science of souls.*" Vincent was a worthy disciple who would himself protest that he was only imitating his holy founder. God is glorified in His saints!

The Angel of the Apocalypse provides us with some valuable lessons. Of course, no one knows the day nor the hour of the Second Coming, but we can imitate Saint Vincent in his penitential life so as to be ready at all times to meet Our Judge. We will have little to fear if we combine that penitential life with the humility and love for Jesus and Mary that Saint Vincent had. His intercession, once so powerful on earth, has surely only increased in Heaven. Pray to him in confidence and he will no doubt intercede for you before his beloved Master, Jesus Christ and his most beautiful Queen, Mary, the Mother of God.

The great humility of this saint appeared amidst the honors and applause which followed him. He lays down this principle as the preliminary to all virtue that a person be deeply grounded in humility "*For whosoever will proudly dispute or contradict, will always stand without the door. Christ, the master of humility, manifests His truth only to the humble and hides Himself from the proud.*"

Only through the one, true religion has a dead person ever been brought back to life. We see the first recorded accounts of the dead being raised in the Old Testament; the great prophets Elias and Eliseus raised at least three persons who had died.

In the New Testament, following the example of the Divine Founder of our Holy Religion, Saints Peter and Paul also raised several persons from the dead. The fact is that only through the Roman Catholic Church, from the time of Our Lord until today, has anyone been brought back from the grave! (Have you ever heard any reports of a Lutheran, Baptist, Jehovah's Witness, Evangelical Christian, Jew, Hindu, Buddhist, etc. making any such claim?)

The list of Catholic saints who have performed resurrection miracles appears endless! (St. Hilary, St. Ambrose, St. Martin of Tours, St. Benedict, St. Bernard, St. Anthony, just to name a few, and the tally goes on). St. Vincent Ferrer raised at least twenty-eight persons. St. Joan of Arc brought a stillborn baby back to life long enough for it to be baptized. [St. Patrick of Ireland](http://www.olrl.org/lives/ferrer.shtml) raised nearly forty people from the dead many of whom had been dead and buried for years.

Hundreds of these resurrection miracles are well documented and authenticated; not only by Catholic sources, but also by many secular and historical records as well.

<http://www.olrl.org/lives/ferrer.shtml>