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SERMON 20: PALM SUNDAY

[Sermon] 1. *Go forth and see, daughter of Zion, King Solomon in the diadem with which his mother crowned him.* Song of Songs 3:11. Blessed Augustine in *The City of God* says: "Those things said of Solomon so far are appropriate to Christ alone, so in that one the figure is veiled while in Christ the truth is represented."³⁵² In order to truly and properly complete the shadowy figure and exhibit the truth, the proposed words can be assumed to commend the feast today. Indeed today the Jewish synagogue, mother of Christ according the flesh, goes out to meet Christ, and in both word and deed crowned him with imperial glory and kingly honor. This honor is shown to Christ and represented by mother Church leaving the city in procession, so her children might learn first to leave behind the deformity of sin, then know and see God in the clarity of their own conscience, and later show the honor due to his majesty.³⁵³ Whence three things for our instruction are noted in the words proposed: namely, the forsaking of one's deformity, the contemplation of divine beauty and the exhibition of grandeur and honor. And each one is a disposition for the other, for purity of conscience prepares one for the knowledge or vision of the beauty proper to divine wisdom, and contemplation of the eternal lights prepares one to honor divine majesty. For first, in the pro-

³⁵² Bonaventure has adapted Book XVII, c. 8 n. 2 of *De civitate Dei*. See CCSL xlviii, 571.

³⁵³ On the religious and social dimensions of medieval liturgical processions, see Éric Palazzo, *Liturgie et société au Moyen Age* (Paris: Aubier, 2000), 58-71.

posed words the Holy Spirit arouses every Christian soul to forsake one's deformity, so it can be prepared, when it says: *Go forth, daughter of Zion*; Zion is interpreted as mirror³⁵⁴ and signifies the pure soul prepared like a mirror to receive the divine reflection. Second, it invites the contemplation of regal beauty, so it can be delighted, when it adds: *and see King Solomon*, that is, Christ exemplified in many aspects by Solomon. Third, it explains the exhibition of honor and grandeur, so it can be instructed, when it includes: *in the diadem with which his mother crowned him*.

2. First, therefore, it urges each faithful soul to forsake sin, so it can be prepared for the vision of God, when it says: *Go forth, daughter of Zion*. That soul forsakes the deformity of sin and prepares itself according to all its powers for the vision of God, which goes forth first from the darkness of error and the ignorance that blinds reason; second, from the enticements of carnal depravity that deforms the concupiscible power; third, from the command of diabolical cruelty that oppresses the irascible power. First, this is done by beholding the truth of the one who is of the greatest intelligibility; second, by the will clinging to the one who is the most lovable; third, by attaining liberty in the one who is most honorable.

3. First, we must go forth from the darkness of error and the ignorance that blinds reason, by beholding the truth of the one who is of the greatest intelligibility. Matthew 15:22 speaks of this: *Behold a Canaanite woman came out of that territory and cried out to him, saying: Have mercy on me, son of David*. The person who wants to perceive the goodness of faith and come forth from the ignorance of darkness must imitate the example of this

³⁵⁴ See CCSL lxxii, 122: "Zion means mirror."

woman, who first prepared herself by capturing the intellect³⁵⁵ in order to believe the first Truth for its own sake and above all things; and this is what is said: *Behold a Canaanite woman*; indeed Canaanite is interpreted as prepared.³⁵⁶ Second, she separated herself from an evil society,³⁵⁷ because *maleficent company corrupts morals*.³⁵⁸ Whence it follows: *she came out of that territory*, namely of the unfaithful. Afterwards moved by the affective power, she cried out with a sincere soul; likewise with an earnest proposal from the operative power, because then Christ, who is the true light, fills the cognitive power of the ready soul with the truth of faith. Whence that woman was so illumined with the brightness of faith that this Truth said to her: *O woman, great is your faith*.³⁵⁹

4. Second, we must go forth from the enticements of carnal depravity that deforms the concupiscible power, by clinging with the will to the one who is the most lovable. Lot speaks of this going forth to his people in Genesis 19:14: *Arise and go forth from this place because the Lord will destroy this city. He seemed to them as if he was jesting when speaking*. This city Sodom, which was the most defiled among all the cities, signifies the carnal state of those who, in their impurities, lose the light of reason and understanding. Absorbed in delights and thus sterile, they possess no useful fruit because the natural ones are consumed and grace-filled or spiritual ones are stripped away. The Holy Spirit therefore says to those existing in this state through preachers, who are divine messengers:

³⁵⁵ See 2 Cor 10:5.

³⁵⁶ See CCSL lxxii, 135: "Canaanite means possessing or possession."

³⁵⁷ The critical edition refers to Glossa Interlinearis on Matt 15:22.

³⁵⁸ See 1 Cor 15:33: "Evil companionships corrupt good morals."

³⁵⁹ See Matt 15:28.

Arise by detesting sin, and go forth from this place of carnal lewdness, by forsaking sin: because the Lord will destroy this city, with the extermination of divine damnation. But because the impure and carnal are so absorbed in the delights of the flesh that they are out of their minds, the preacher seems to them to be *jesting when speaking*; but later, when they die in their sins, they experience in fact what they refused to consider in the words of the preacher. Whence these, who refused to believe the words of Lot were announcing the way of salvation, perished together with the *defiled city*.

5. Third, we must go forth from the command of diabolical cruelty that oppresses the irascible power, by attaining liberty in the one who is most honorable. Exodus 13:3 speaks figuratively of this going forth: *Remember this day in which you came forth out of Egypt and out of the house of bondage, for the Lord led you out of that place with a strong hand*. Liberation out of the house of bondage of Pharaoh signifies liberation from the house of diabolical bondage. For just as Pharaoh was cruelly afflicting the sons of Israel who were serving him by collecting straw, gathering clay, making bricks, and constructing cities, so too the devil oppresses and afflicts those who serve him by collecting the straw of vain thoughts, gathering the clay of impure delights or affections, making bricks of perverse actions, and constructing cities of irrevocable aversion. In order that we might be grateful to him, the Lord brings to mind the benefit of this liberation from such cruel bondage, when it says: *Remember this day in which you came forth out of Egypt and out of the house of diabolical bondage*. So as not to ascribe such a great benefit to human infirmity, but to divine strength, it therefore adds: *for he led you out with a strong divine hand, not with a weak human hand*.

6. Second, it invites the contemplation of regal beauty, when it adds: *and see King Solomon*, that is, Christ. That person moreover contemplates and sees the true King Solomon or Christ within one's conscience in a salutary manner, who first firmly believes the truth of his infallible wisdom with a captive intellect;³⁶⁰ second, who sincerely loves the kindness of his indescribable clemency with devoted affection; third, who voluntarily imitates the humility of his voluntary renunciation in actual practice. For on this day the King of kings, Christ, shows the profound humility to be imitated, when he entered Jerusalem seated *upon an ass*,³⁶¹ not upon an adorned horse. He exhibited great kindness when he, who was the ruler and Lord of all celestial spirits or heavenly multitudes, deigned to be made king and head of the multitude of infirm pilgrims; and he demonstrated the complete truth of the shadow found in the Law, when he showed in deeds what had been prophesized and figuratively expressed about him was fulfilled.

7. First, therefore, *see King Solomon*, whose truth of infallible wisdom deserves the firm faith of the captive intellect. And 1 Kings 10:23 speaks figuratively of this: *King Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom. And all the earth desired to see Solomon's face to hear his wisdom, which God had given to his heart.* In many aspects Solomon represents Christ, the true Solomon, for Christ is this true and wisest Solomon. Indeed he is the wisdom of the Father, from whom comes all wisdom and understanding in angelic spirits and human beings; and truly he is a peaceful king, indeed our peace, *who makes both one*³⁶² and brings concord to an-

³⁶⁰ See 2 Cor 10:5.

³⁶¹ See Zech 9:9 and Matt 21:5.

³⁶² See Eph 2:14.

cient discord in the covenant of his own blood. And he is a magnificent king as well, who as a human being *exceeded all the kings of the earth* and heaven, because humanity was assumed into unity with a divine person; *in riches*, of divine charismata, and the *wisdom*, of lucid knowledge. *And all the earth*, that is all the inhabitants of the earth – here the container specifies what is contained – *desired to see Solomon's face*, due to the brilliance of original innocence, in order *to hear*, with a ready ear, the *wisdom which God had given to his heart*, in an infusion, because he had not learned with human inquiry; and so he might believe the wisdom he heard without agitation with a captive intellect.

8. Second, *see King Solomon*, whose kind, indescribable clemency deserves the sincere love of devoted affection. And Proverbs 20:28 speaks of this: *Mercy and truth preserve the king, and his throne is strengthened by clemency.* Since pious mercy without justice is a vice rather than a virtue, *for the hands of merciful women have boiled their children*,³⁶³ and severe justice without pious mercy is neither pleasing to nor approved by God, for *judgment without mercy* is accorded him *who does not show mercy*,³⁶⁴ therefore, it says: *mercy and truth preserve the king of kings*,³⁶⁵ Christ, through whom *kings reign* and princes *decree just matters*.³⁶⁶ He is the true exemplar of all mercy and justice, because *all the ways* of the Lord Christ, the King of kings, are *mercy and truth*.³⁶⁷ But be-

³⁶³ See Lam 4:10: "The hands of the pitiful women have boiled their own children."

³⁶⁴ See James 2:13: "For judgment is without mercy to him who has not shown mercy, but mercy triumphs over judgment."

³⁶⁵ See Rev 19:16.

³⁶⁶ See Prov 8:15: "By me kings reign, and lawgivers decree just matters."

³⁶⁷ See Ps 24:10.

cause pious mercy in forgiveness *triumphs over the judgment*³⁶⁸ of severity in condemnation; it adds: *his throne is strengthened by clemency*,³⁶⁹ so that any sinner, no matter how great, should not despair out of fear when considering the severe justice of the one revealing the sentence. On the contrary, one ought to recover strength and trust in the kind mercy, which quickly forgives, totally forgets, and lovingly takes back.

9. Third, see *King Solomon*, whose humble renunciation deserves imitation in the conformity of actual practice. And Zechariah 9:9-10 speaks of this: *Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout for joy daughters of Jerusalem: behold your king comes to you, just and savior; he is poor and riding upon an ass and the foal of the ass. And I will destroy the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem, the bow of war will be broken, and he will speak peace to the peoples, and his power will be from sea to sea. Any faithful soul, a daughter of Zion and Jerusalem, that is, of mother Church, must go forth today in accord with the Jewish example to meet Christ, not only with bodily steps, but even with affectionate minds, exultant hearts, jubilant mouths, humility in one's clothing to mortify licentious flesh, olive branches signifying internal devotion, and palm branches signifying victory and honor. This is because our king, Jesus Christ, through his humility, defeated the proud enemy, the devil, and submerged his army into the abyss of the infernal sea, and liberated his people with his own blood. Whence the following comes a little after the previously mentioned authority: *In the blood of your testament you truly have led the prisoners**

³⁶⁸ See James 2:13: "... but mercy triumphs over justice."

³⁶⁹ See Prov 20:28: "Mercy and truth preserve the king, and his throne is strengthened by clemency."

out of the pit,³⁷⁰ namely, the inhabitants of the earth liberated from the power of the devil, and offered your poverty in place of worldly cupidity and "constituted them heirs and kings of the heavenly kingdom."³⁷¹ And on account of this, our king Christ does not come arrogantly today with chariots and adorned horses, but *meekly and riding upon an ass* of contemptibility, not pompous in riches and precious gems; but as *savior, poor himself*, so that through his humility he might ruin the four-horse *chariot* of arrogance and the *horse* of proud pompousness, and destroy the *bow* of diabolical deception, so that through his poverty, he might speak *peace to the peoples*, calling them back from the love of the world and drawing them toward love and praise of God.

10. Lastly, the exhibition of honor and grandeur is noted when it says: *in the diadem with which his mother crowned him*. She honored or crowned Christ: first, Mary, the Virgin mother with the carnal diadem of original innocence in the conception; second, the mother Synagogue with the thorny diadem of pain and ignominy in the passion; third, the mother of divine justice with the splendid diadem of honor and glory in the resurrection.

11. First, *his mother crowned him*, namely the Virgin Mary, with the carnal diadem of original innocence in the conception, according to what is said in The Song of Songs 3:11: *Go forth and see, daughter of Zion, King Solomon in the diadem with which his mother crowned him on the day of his espousals, and the joy of his heart. Daughter of Zion go forth, from the deformity of sin; and see the king of kings, the true Savior, Christ incarnate, in*

³⁷⁰ See Zech 9:11: "You also by the blood of your testament have sent forth your prisoners out of the pit, where there is no water."

³⁷¹ See Rule of the Friars Minor, chapter 6 in FA:ED, vol. 1, 103.

the diadem, of original innocence, with which his mother crowned him, the Virgin Mary, who conceived him in the power of the Holy Spirit on the day of his espousals with human nature, which was bound in the unity of person and joined with the Word of God, like a bride with the bridegroom in an indissoluble bond, in the virginal womb with chaste love, benevolence, indescribable happiness and great joy.

12. Second, *his mother crowned him, namely the Jewish synagogue, with the thorny diadem of pain and ignominy in the passion. And Revelation 19:12-13 is able to explain this: On his head are many diadems, he has a name written which no one knows except himself, and he is clothed in a garment sprinkled with blood.* The impious synagogue crowned Christ not only with the thorny diadem of ignominious suffering, but even augmented that one with many other disparaging diadems of shameful contemptibility. Just as today it magnifies him with imperial glory and regal honor; so he might gloriously enter holy Jerusalem; so on the Passover it made him leave from holy Jerusalem slandered and in shame; and whatever honor is bestowed today was converted into dishonor on Friday: for in the place of flowers it imposes a crown of thorns on his head, in the place of olive branches it fitted the cross to his shoulders, in place of humble clothing his own clothes were stripped away and divided into four parts, in place of praise it reproached with blasphemy. After the glory of today's veneration almost at the same time, in the same city, and from the same people he is subjected to the ignominy of a shameful passion. For that reason mother Church begins to read the passion after the procession. He, however, is Christ the King, on whose head were all these previously mentioned diadems. He has a name written above his head: *Jesus the Nazarene,*

*King of the Jews,*³⁷² which no one among those persecuting him knows to be the true name of Christ except the one to whom he is pleased to reveal it.³⁷³ And he is clothed in a garment of flesh sprinkled with his own blood.

13. Third, *his mother crowned him, namely divine justice with the splendid diadem of honor and glory on the resurrection. And Job 29:14 is able to explain this: I am clad with justice, and I clothed myself as with a robe and a diadem with your judgment.* Since the Lord Jesus Christ humbled himself so much that he was willing to be handed over, as one betrayed, to be judged by sinners, and to be declared guilty of condemnation, and condemned, to be killed in the most disgraceful way; therefore, in accord with the ineffable rule of divine justice, which is: *The one who humbles oneself will be exalted,*³⁷⁴ he was exalted upon the royal throne given his profound humility and crowned with the diadem of honor and glory. Whence as much then as his flesh was thrown to the ground as if of little value, so much the more is it encompassed in glory and honor. Let us ask the Lord, etc.

³⁷² See John 19:19.

³⁷³ See Matt 11:27.

³⁷⁴ See Matt 23:12 and Luke 14:11.