

CHAPTER IV

The Perfection with which Most Holy Mary Kept the Ceremonies of the Temple, and what She Was Ordered to do Within It.

462. Let us now return to our heavenly narrative. After the most holy Child had begun to consecrate the temple by her holy presence and daily life, She grew from day to day in wisdom and grace before God and men. The understanding which was given me of that which the powerful hand of God proceeded to work in the heavenly Princess during these years places me as it were at the shore of a vast and unmeasured sea, leaving me lost in astonishment and doubt as to how I am to embark on such an immense ocean for the destined port, for I am forced to leave much unsaid, and it is difficult to describe even the smallest part. I will relate that which the Most High explained to me on one occasion in his own words:

463. “The works in the temple of She who was to be the Mother of the incarnate Word were altogether and in every way most perfect, and to understand them exceeds the capacity of all creatures human and angelic. Her interior acts of the virtues were so precious and of such exalted merit and fervor that they surpass all the virtues of the highest Seraphim, and thou, soul, shalt know them much more than thou canst explain them with thy words and language. Yet it is my will that during the time of thy pilgrimage in thy mortal body thou place most holy Mary as the beginning of thy joy, and follow Her through the desert of renunciation and denial of all that is human and visible. Follow Her by perfect imitation according to thy strength and the light thou receivest. She shall be thy north star and thy Teacher, and shall manifest to thee my will, and in Her by the power of my arm thou shalt find written my most holy law, upon which thou must meditate day and night. She it is who by her intercession shall strike the rock of the humanity of Christ (Num. 20:11), that in this desert may abound in thee the waters of divine grace and light so thy thirst may be satiated, thy understanding enlightened, and thy will inflamed. She shall be a pillar of fire to illuminate thy path (Ex. 13:21) and a cloud to give thee shade and refreshment against the ardors of thy passions and the inclemency of thy enemies.* Thou shalt have in Her an angel who shall guide thee (Ex. 23:20) and divert far from thee the dangers of Babylon and of Sodom† so my punishment shall not reach thee. Thou shalt have in Her a Mother to love thee, a Friend to console thee, a Lady to command thee, a Protectress to shield thee, and a Queen whom thou canst serve and obey as her slave. In the virtues which this Mother of my Onlybegotten exercised in the temple thou shalt find a universal summary of all the highest perfection by which thou canst govern thy life; a spotless mirror in which is reflected the image of the incarnate Word; an exact copy without errors of all his sanctity; the loveliness of virginity, the beauty of humility, the promptitude of devotion and obedience, the firmness of faith, the certitude of hope, the blaze of love, and a most copious map of all the wonders of my right hand. By this standard thou must regulate thy life, and by this mirror I desire thee to compose and

* N.B. In the original English edition Rev. Blatter here inserts a new paragraph, number 464, which added to the new paragraph he inserted in par. 129 causes all his paragraph numbers from 466 - 545 to be two greater than in the Spanish edition of Most Rev. Samaniego which he took verbatim from the original handwritten manuscript of Ven. Mary. I have corrected these paragraph numbers for this New English Edition. See the footnote for par. 543 for further anomalies in this regard. [Ed.]

† cf. Gen. 19:15-17 [Ed.]

adorn thyself, adding to thy beauty and grace of a bride who desires to enter into the chamber of her Spouse and Lord.

464. “And if the nobility and quality of the teacher serves as a stimulus to the disciple and makes his doctrine more agreeable, who can attract thee with greater force than the very Teacher who is the Mother of thy Spouse, chosen as the most pure and holy, and without stain of sin, so She could be at the same time Virgin and Mother of the Onlybegotten of the eternal Father, who is the splendor of his divinity and of the same substance? Therefore hear such a sovereign Teacher, follow Her by imitating Her, and meditate always without intermission upon her admirable excellence and virtues. And take notice that the life and conversation She had in the temple is the original which all the souls who consecrate themselves in imitation of Her as spouses of Christ must copy within themselves.” This is the explanation and instruction which the Most High gave me in general regarding the actions of most holy Mary in the years She lived in the temple.

465. But let us proceed to a more particular description of her occupations. After the vision of the Divinity described in chapter II,* and after She had offered Herself entirely to the Lord and delivered up to her instructress all that She possessed, being thus deprived of all, entirely bound over to obedience, and hiding beneath the veil of these virtues treasures of grace and wisdom greater than that of the Seraphim, She requested the priest and her teacher to prescribe for Her an order of life and to direct Her in the occupations which She was to assume. The priest and her instructress, having together considered her petition with the aid of a special enlightenment from on high, and desiring to regulate from now on the exercises of this heavenly Child of only three years, called Her to their presence. The Princess of heaven remained kneeling before them during this interview, and though they bade Her rise She begged most humbly to be allowed to remain in this reverent position in the presence of the minister and priest of the Most High and her teacher due to their office and dignity.

466. The priest spoke to Her and said: “My daughter, as a very young child the Lord has drawn thee to his house and holy temple; be grateful for this favor and seek to profit from it by much labor in serving Him in truth and perfection of heart, and acquiring all the virtues, so thou mayest return from this sacred place prepared and fortified to bear the labors of the world and be protected from its dangers. Obey thy teacher Anne and begin early to bear the sweet yoke of virtue (Lam. 3:27), so thou mayest find it more easy to bear during the rest of thy life.” The sovereign Child answered: “Do thou, my master, as priest and minister of the Most High, who takest his place, together with my teacher, command and instruct me in what I must do so I may not err in my duty. This I beg of thee, desiring to obey thy will in all things.”

467. The priest and her teacher Anne felt within themselves a great enlightenment and divine impulse to attend especially to this heavenly Child and to care for Her more than the other maidens. Conferring with themselves about this great esteem with which they had been inspired, though ignorant of the mystery by which it came to them, they resolved to devote particular attention to her guidance and assistance. Yet since their care could extend only to the exterior and visible actions, they were far from suspecting the interior acts and inspirations of her Heart, for over these the Most High watched with singular protection and favor. Thus the candid Heart of the Princess of heaven remained free to advance and grow in interior vision, without losing one instant in which She did not reach what is highest and most excellent in virtue.

* cf. *Conception* 429ff. [Ed.]

468. Thus the priest also ordered her occupations and said: “My daughter, to the divine praises and canticles of the Lord thou shalt assist with all reverence and devotion, and always pray to the Most High for the necessities of his holy temple and of his people, and for the coming of the Messiah. At eight o’clock in the evening thou shalt retire for sleep, and at the beginning of dawn thou shalt arise in order to praise the Lord until the third hour (which corresponds to our nine o’clock in the morning). From the third hour until evening thou shalt occupy thyself in some manual works in order to be instructed in all things. At meals, which thou shalt take after thy labors, observe appropriate temperance. Then thou shalt go to hear the instructions of thy teacher; the rest of the day thou shalt engage thyself in the reading of Holy Scriptures. And in all things be humble, affable, and obedient to the commands of thy instructress.”

469. The most holy Child remained on her knees while She listened to the words of the priest, and then asked his blessing. Having kissed his hand and the hand of her teacher, She proposed in her Heart to observe the order of life assigned to Her during her stay in the temple and as long as they would not command Her otherwise; and as it was proposed to Her, so did She fulfill as the Mistress of sanctity and virtue, and as if She was the least disciple. Her desires and most ardent love impelled Her to many other external exercises which they had not included in their orders, but with regard to these She subjected Herself to the minister of the Lord, preferring the sacrifice of perfect and holy obedience to the high dictates of her own fervor. She knew as Mistress of all perfection that the divine will is more surely fulfilled by the humble acquiescence of obedience than in following the highest aspirations to other virtues. By this rare example let souls, and especially those in the religious state, learn not to follow their own short-lived fervors and opinions contrary to obedience and the will of their superiors, for in the latter God makes known to us his desire and pleasure, whereas in the former we seek only our own whim; in the superiors God himself operates, while in ourselves (if we work contrary to their orders) temptations, blind passion, and deceit are active.

470. In the performance of works not commanded Her our Queen and Lady distinguished Herself from the other maidens by asking permission of her teacher to be allowed to serve them all and to be engaged in the humble occupations of scrubbing and cleaning the rooms and washing the dishes. Though this seemed extraordinary, especially in one of the firstborn children, who were treated with greater consideration and respect, yet the incomparable humility of the heavenly Princess could not be restrained or confined by any consideration of what was due to her position, but sought the most humble occupations. With such an eager humility She knew how to gain time and opportunity for doing such work, and thus was beforehand in assuming the tasks of others. By means of her infused science She understood all the mysteries and ceremonies of the temple, yet She was anxious to learn them also by study and practice as if She was ignorant of them, nor did She ever fail in any ceremony or duty, no matter how small. In her humility She was most studious, and most eager to serve in her self-abasement. Every morning and evening She asked the blessing of her teacher and kissed her hand, and the same She did whenever She was ordered or was permitted to perform works of humility. Sometimes, when it was allowed Her, She kissed her feet with profound humility.

471. The sovereign Princess was so docile, so sweet, and so friendly in her actions, so ready to serve and so eager and diligent in humbling Herself, so anxious to show kindness and esteem toward all the maidens in the temple, that She captured the heart of all, and obeyed all as if each one had been her teacher. By her ineffable and heavenly prudence She proceeded in all her actions in such a manner that She never lost an occasion for engaging in lowly work, in humble service of her companions, and in the fulfillment of the divine pleasure.

472. But what shall I, most vile creature, and what shall all the faithful children of the Catholic Church think when describing and considering such a vivid example of humility? It seems to us great virtue when the inferior obeys the superior or the lowly yields to the exalted, and we esteem it a great humility that the equal submit to his equal. But when the inferior commands and the superior obeys, when the Queen humbles Herself as a slave, the most holy and perfect of all creatures as a mere wormlet, the Queen of heaven and earth as the least of women, and when this is done with all her Heart and in all sincerity, who is not astonished and confounded in his swelling pride? Who will not see, as in a clear mirror, his unhappy presumption? Who can convince himself that he knows what true humility is, much less exercise it, when he sees it exhibited in its reality and in its own element, most holy Mary? Souls who live under the vow of obedience, let us approach this light in order to know and correct our disorders which show themselves whenever obedience to our superiors, who represent God, contradicts our whims, and hence becomes hard and troublesome. Here let our hardness be crushed, let the proudest humiliate herself and be confounded in her shameful pride; let her banish all presumption, and let her not deem herself obedient and humble because on certain occasions she has yielded to the superiors, for she is yet far from thinking herself inferior and beneath her companions as did most holy Mary, who is superior to all.

473. The beauty, grace, charm and amiability of our Queen were incomparable, since all the natural gifts were hers in a most perfect degree; yet in addition this charm was enhanced by supernatural divine grace, effecting a wonderful combination of grace and beauty in her being and activity by which She draws the admiration and affection of all. Divine Providence moderated the outward demonstrations of this affection which those who conversed with Her would have shown if they had been left to the natural force of their spontaneous love of the Queen. In eating and sleeping (as in all the virtues) She was most perfect, observing the measure dictated by temperance. Never did She exceed it, nor could She; rather, She deducted from that which was necessary. Although her curtailed sleep did not interrupt her high contemplation as I have said before (352), yet She would have gladly omitted it altogether; in virtue of obedience, however, She retired to rest at the time appointed, and on her humble and poor couch, strewn with the flowers of virtue (Cant. 1:15) and surrounded by the Seraphim and the angelic host who guarded and assisted Her, She enjoyed more exalted contemplation (outside of the beatific vision) and more ardent ecstasies of love than all of them together.

474. She divided her time and applied it with rare prudence in order to give to each of her actions and occupations its proper share. She read much in the ancient Sacred Scriptures, and by means of her infused science She was so well versed in them and in all their profound mysteries that none of them was unfamiliar to Her, for the Most High made known to Her all their mysteries and sacraments. She treated and conversed about them in her conferences with the holy Angels of her guard, familiarizing Herself with them and asking about them with incomparable intelligence and great acuteness. If this sovereign Teacher had written what She understood we would have many other divine writings, and of those which the Church possesses we could attain the entire and perfect understanding of their profound meanings and mysteries. All the plenitude of this science She utilized for the worship, praise and love of God; to this She applied all her knowledge, without allowing one ray of her divine enlightenment to remain sterile or idle. She was most quick in her reasoning, most profound in her understanding, most exalted and noble in her thoughts, most prudent in her choice and arrangement of words, most efficacious and sweet in her operations, and in all things She was a most perfect example and an

object of admiration for men and angels, and even, in a way, for the Lord himself, who had formed Her altogether according to his Heart and pleasure.

INSTRUCTION OF THE SOVEREIGN LADY.

475. My daughter, human nature is imperfect and remiss in practicing virtue and easily weakens in its exercise, for it continually seeks rest and evades labor with all its might. When the soul listens to and extemporizes with the animal and carnal part of its nature, this latter will engross and overcome the forces of reason and the spirit, and will reduce them to a dangerous and shameful slavery. In all souls this disorder of nature is formidable and abominable; yet without comparison God abhors it more in his ministers and religious, for whom the obligation of being perfect is more expected, and therefore the danger is greater if they do not always come out victorious in this conflict of the passions. By this tepidity in resisting temptations, and by their frequent defeats, there results a discouragement and perversity of judgment which engenders a self-satisfied conviction of false security, content with the performance of certain easy outward practices of virtue, at the same time imagining (without the least real advancement) that they are moving mountains. The demon then introduces other distractions and temptations, and because of their small appreciation of the rules and practices of religion they begin to weaken in all of them, esteem them as a light and unimportant matter, and living on in their false security come to lose the very perception of true virtue.

476. I desire thee, my daughter, to guard against this error. Remember that a voluntary remissness in regard to one imperfection prepares and opens the way for others; these facilitate the commission of venial sins, these again of mortal sins. Thus the descent is from one abyss to another,* until the bottom is found in the disregard of all evil. In order to prevent such a misfortune it is necessary to intercept from afar the current of sin, for the practice or ceremony which seems but small is an outwork which keeps the enemy at a distance, while the precepts and laws concerning more important matters are the fortress walls of conscience. If the demon can break through and gain the outer defenses he is in a better position to gain the inner ones. If then an opening is made in the bulwarks by the commission of sin, although it may not be a very grievous one, he already has a better opportunity to make an assault on the interior reign of a soul. Since the soul finds herself weakened by vicious acts and habits and without the strength of grace, she does not resist the attack with fortitude, and the demon, acquiring more and more power over her, begins to subject and oppress her without opposition.

477. Now therefore consider, my dearest, how great must be thy watchfulness, and how great is the necessity of not falling asleep in the midst of so many dangers. Remember thou art a religious, a spouse of Christ, a superior, taught and enlightened, and favored with so many singular blessings. Upon these titles and others thou must ponder and gauge thy carefulness, since for all of them thou owest a return and correspondence to the Lord. Exert thyself to be punctual in the fulfillment of all the rules and practices of religion; let there be no rule, no command, and no exercise of perfection which ever seems small to thee; despise or forget none of them; observe them all with rigor, for in the eyes of God all is precious and of great importance when practiced according to his pleasure. It is certain He finds pleasure in seeing his commands fulfilled and is offended in seeing them set aside. Therefore in all things consider

* cf. Ps. 41:8 [Ed.]

thou hast a Spouse whom thou must please, a God whom thou must serve, a Father whom thou must obey, a Judge whom thou must fear, and a Teacher whom thou must imitate and follow.

478. So thou mayest fulfill all this thou must renew in thy soul the strong resolution not to listen to thy inclinations, nor yield to the negligence and weakness of thy nature; do not omit any practice or exercise because of its difficulty, as for instance kissing the ground as thou has been accustomed to do according to the custom of the religious. Perform both small and great works with a loving constancy, and thus thou shalt be pleasing in the eyes of my Son and myself. Regarding the works of supererogation, after praying for a holy alacrity, ask advice of thy confessor and superior, and perform them with a spirit entirely free of any predilection or self-love. That which they direct accept and write in thy heart, never resting in its punctual fulfillment. If it is possible to avail thyself of obedience and counsel, never decide anything for thyself, howsoever good it may appear to thee, for the true will of God is always manifest in holy obedience.