

## CHAPTER VIII

### *The Virtue of Charity in Most Holy Mary, Our Lady.*

514. The superexcellent virtue of charity is the mistress, the queen, the mother, the life, and the beauty of all the other virtues. Charity governs, moves and directs them to their ultimate and true end; it leads them on to their ultimate perfection, preserves them and makes them grow, enlightens them and beautifies them, giving them life and efficacy. If all the other virtues cause in the creature some perfection and adornment, charity gives them perfection itself and perfects all the other virtues, since without charity all is ugly, obscure, apathetic, dead, and without profit, because it does not have the perfect movement of life or purpose. Charity is kind (I Cor. 13:4ff.), patient, meek, without emulation, without envy, without offensiveness, desires not to acquire but readily distributes all, is the cause of all good, and insofar as it is concerned consents to no iniquity\* because it is the greatest participation of truth and the highest Good. O virtue of virtues and greatest treasure of heaven! Thou alone hast the key of paradise! Thou art the dawn of eternal light, the sun of the day of eternity, the fire which purifies, the wine which inebriates† giving new guidance, the nectar which rejoices, the sweetness which satiates without weariness, the chamber of rest for the soul, and a bond so intimate that it makes us one with God (Jn. 17:21) with the same bond which unites the eternal Father to the Son, and both to the Holy Ghost.

515. Because of the nobility of this most excellent of all virtues our God and Lord (according to our understanding) desired to honor it with his Name, or to honor Himself by it, by calling Himself charity as St. John said (I Jn. 4:16). There are many reasons why the Catholic Church attributes the divine perfections of omnipotence to the Father, of wisdom to the Son, and of love to the Holy Ghost, for the Father is the beginning without beginning, the Son is born of the Father through the understanding, and the Holy Ghost proceeds from both through the will. But the name of charity and the perfection which it implies is attributed to the Lord himself without distinction of Persons, since the Evangelist says indiscriminately *God is charity*. This virtue in the Lord has the distinction of being the terminus or end of all his operations *ad intra* and *ad extra*, since on the one hand all the divine processions (which are the operations of the Divinity within Himself, or *ad intra*) terminate in the reciprocal union and love of the three divine Persons, by which They have among Themselves another indissoluble bond<sup>Δ</sup> after the unity of the indivisible nature in which They are one and the same God. On the other hand the works *ad extra*, namely the creatures, are an offspring of divine charity and are ordained towards it, so issuing from that immense sea of divine bounty they also return by charity and love to the source from whence they sprang. It is peculiar to the virtue of charity, in contradistinction to all the other virtues and gifts, that it is a perfect participation of a divine virtue; it is born of one source, is directed back to the same, and is more adapted to that eternal source than all other virtues. If we call God our hope, our patience, or our wisdom, it is because we receive them from his hand, and not because these perfections are in God as they exist in ourselves. But we call God our charity not only because we receive it from the Lord and because He communicates it to us, but because He himself is essential charity, and the overflow of this divine perfection, which we

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\* cf. II Thes. 2:11 [Ed.]

† cf. Cant. 2:4 [Ed.]

Δ cf. Col. 3:14 [Ed.]

represent to ourselves as a form and attribute of his divine nature, redounds in our souls, transforming it more perfectly and abundantly than any other virtue.

516. Other admirable qualities of charity are manifested in the relation between God and ourselves, for since this virtue is the source of our being, and afterwards our highest end, God himself, it is also the spur and the ideal of our affection and love of the Lord; for if the knowledge that God is in Himself the infinite and highest Good is not sufficient to move and incite us to love Him, at least the knowledge that He is our own greatest Good should draw and oblige us to love Him. If we could not know how to love Him before He gave his Onlybegotten for us (I Jn. 4:10), we certainly cannot have an excuse for not loving Him after that sacrifice; for though we might be exonerated for not being able to merit such a benefit, yet now, after we have received this sacrifice without our merit, we can certainly not be excused for not acknowledging the favor.

517. The example which divine charity furnishes for our own manifests still more the excellence of this virtue, though it is difficult for me to explain my perception of this excellence. When Christ our Lord founded his most perfect law of love and grace, He exhorted us to be perfect imitators of our heavenly Father,\* who allows his sun to rise over the just and the unjust without distinction (Mt. 5:45). Such doctrine and such an example only He himself, the Son of the eternal Father, could give to men. Among all the visible creatures there is none like the sun to compare with divine charity and show us how to imitate it, for this most noble star, from its very nature, without hesitation and entirely according to its own innate tendency, distributes its light in all directions and without distinction to all who are capable of receiving it, and on its part never denies or suspends its benevolent activity. And this it does without desiring acknowledgment, without imposing any obligation on anyone, without asking for benefits or requiring any return, without finding in the objects of its enlightening bounty any previous goodness to move and draw it towards them, nor does it expect any profit in the communication of its own blessed light in which all participate and share.

518. At the consideration of the noble attributes of this created charity, who will not recognize the signature of the uncreated Charity which it follows? And who is not ashamed in failing to imitate it? Who can claim to have true charity in himself without copying its prototype? It is true our charity and love cannot create goodness in the object of its affection as is done by the uncreated charity of the Lord; nevertheless, even if by charity we cannot make good those whom we love, we can offer the goods of love to all without looking for the advancement of ourselves and without proceeding to deliberate and study whom we are to love and benefit in the hope of being repaid. I do not want to be understood as saying that love is not free, or God was in any way forced to create through natural necessity, for all the works *ad extra*, which are those of creation, are free acts of God. The example contained for us in divine charity points in another direction, namely that the free will must not twist or do violence to the inclination and impulse of charity, but in imitation of the highest Good, who desires to communicate Himself, the human will must allow itself to be moved and impelled by the inclination of charity to communicate its goodness, for in this manner the divine will is impelled to distribute the rays of its inaccessible light to all creatures according to the capacity of each one, without any preceding goodness, service or benefit on their part,† and without waiting for such return afterwards, since the highest Good has need of nothing.

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\* cf. Mt. 5:48 [Ed.]

† cf. I Jn. 4:10 [Ed.]

519. This is in part the nature of charity in God, its divine original. Outside of God himself, however, we will find it in the fullest perfection possible to a mere creature in none other than most holy Mary, and in Her we find the model after which we are more immediately to copy our own charity. It is clear that in sending forth the rays of this light and charity of the uncreated Sun (in whom charity is without limit or end), He communicates his charity to all creatures unto the most remote with order, measure and weight, according to the place which each one holds either nearer or farther from the source; and this order manifests the fullness and perfection of divine Providence, since without it there would be as it were a defect, confusion and discord in the harmony of the creatures as far as the participation in his goodness and love is concerned. The first place in this order after God himself was due to that soul and that Person who was at the same time uncreated God and created man, for the highest grace and participation of love naturally was to be found where existed the closest and most intimate union with God as it existed and will forever exist in Christ our Lord.

520. The second place is due to his Mother, most holy Mary, in whom charity and divine love found its resting place\* in a special manner, for (according to our way of understanding) the uncreated Charity could not rest satiated without communicating Himself to a mere creature with such plenitude that in this creature alone could be gathered the love and charity of the whole human race, so only this creature could supply what was lacking in those of her nature, giving the return which was possible, and participating in the uncreated Charity without the shortcomings and defects mixed in by the rest of mortals infected with sin. Mary alone was chosen among all creatures to imitate the Sun of justice in charity (Cant. 6:9) and faithfully copy this virtue from its original. She by Herself knew how to love more ardently and perfectly than all the rest of creatures combined, to love God entirely for his own sake, purely, intensely, and without defect, and also loving creatures for the sake of God and in a manner similar to Him. She alone adequately followed the impulse of charity and her generous inclination of loving the highest Good as highest Good without any ulterior motives, and of loving the creatures due to their participation in God without the thought of a return or reward of her love. And in order to imitate entirely the uncreated Charity, Mary alone by her charity was able and knew how to love in such a way as to make better that which is loved, for by her love She made better heaven and earth and all things that exist outside of God.

521. If the charity of this great Lady was put on one side of a balance, and that of all men and angels on the other, the charity of most holy Mary would outweigh that of all the rest of creatures, for She by Herself exceeded them all in her knowledge of the essence and qualities of the charity of God, and consequently only Mary knew how to imitate it with adequate perfection and above all the powers of intellectual creatures. In this excess of love and charity She satisfied and corresponded to the debt of creatures incurred by the infinite love of the Lord as far as He could demand a return from them, for their return was not to be infinite in value, that being impossible. Just as the love and charity of the most holy soul of Jesus Christ bore a certain proportion to the hypostatic union to the degree possible, so the charity of Mary bore another proportion to the benefit of the eternal Father in giving Her his most holy Son, for Christ also belonged to Her as his Mother who was to conceive Him and give Him birth for the remedy of the world.

522. Thus we understand that all the gifts and blessings of creatures depend in some manner on the charity and love which most holy Mary had toward God. She caused this virtue and

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\* cf. Eccclus. 24:12 [Ed.]

participation in the divine love to exist among creatures in its ultimate and highest perfection. She paid the whole debt of charity at a time when all men were unable to pay or even to understand the greatness of their debt. In the manner possible She by this most perfect charity obliged the eternal Father that He might give his most holy Son for Herself and for the entire human race, for if most pure Mary had loved less, and if her charity had been defective, the proper preparation for his Incarnation would have been lacking. But as soon as any creature was found who resembled God as closely as She, it was as it were but a natural consequence that He would descend to Her as He did.

523. All this is included in the words of the Holy Ghost when He calls Her *the Mother of fair love* (Ecclus. 24:24) (as in its manner I have said of holy hope [509]), attributing to Her these words: Mary is the Mother of Him who is our sweetest love, Jesus, our Lord and Redeemer, who became the most beautiful among men by a divine, infinite and uncreated beauty, and by a human nature which was to be without guilt or blemish (I Peter 2:22), and to which no beauty of grace which could be communicated by the Divinity was lacking. She is also the Mother of beautiful love, for She alone engendered in her mind the perfect love and charity and the most beautiful affection, which all the rest of creatures combined could not engender given all her beauty and sinlessness, for which cause theirs cannot be called absolutely beautiful. She is the Mother of our love, for She drew it toward the earth for us, She cultivated it for us, and She taught us to know and practice it; for besides most holy Mary there is no other mere creature in heaven or on earth by whom men and angels could become disciples of this beautiful love. Hence all the saints are but rays of this sun, and streamlets flowing from this ocean; so much the better will they know how to love the more they participate in this love and charity of most holy Mary, and insofar as they succeed in imitating and copying it more exactly.

524. The sources of this charity and love of our princess Mary were her profound knowledge and wisdom, derived as well from her infused faith and hope as from the gifts of science, intellect and wisdom given to Her by the Holy Ghost, but above all by her intuitive and abstractive visions of the Divinity. By all these means She reached the highest knowledge of the uncreated Charity and drank of Him from his very fountain, and She thus learned how God was to be loved for his own sake and the creature for the sake of God, and also how to practice and execute this love with the most intense and fervent desire. Moreover as the power of God found no impediment or hindrance, no inadvertence, ignorance or imperfection, nor any tardiness of the will in this Queen, He could operate in Her according to his pleasure. This was not possible in other creatures, for none of them had the disposition of most holy Mary.

525. In Her was the fulfillment of that great natural and divine precept (Dt. 6:5): *Thou shalt love thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole strength*. Mary alone satisfied this obligation and debt for all men, which in this life and before seeing God they neither knew nor could ever fulfill entirely. This Lady fulfilled it more perfectly during her pilgrimage than even the Seraphim in the state of beatitude; moreover, She also satisfied the intentions of God in regard to this precept, namely that it remain not unfruitful and as it were frustrated on the part of wayfaring men, for most holy Mary by Herself sanctified and fulfilled it entirely for all of them, supplying by her charity all that was lacking in the fulfillment of this precept among men. And it is probable that if God had not foreknown that Mary our Queen would be numbered among mortals He would not have given this command in this form, but on her account He was pleased to give it. To Her we owe not only this command of perfect charity, but also the adequate fulfillment of it among men.

526. O most sweet and most beautiful Mother of fair love and charity! Let all the nations know Thee, let all generations bless Thee, and let all creatures magnify and praise Thee! Thou alone art the perfect One, Thou alone are the beloved One, Thou alone art the chosen Mother of uncreated Charity. He formed Thee and selected Thee to shine like the sun (Cant. 6:9) in thy most beautiful and most perfect love. Let all of us miserable children of Eve approach this sun in order to be enlightened and inflamed; let us approach this Mother in order to be born again in love; let us approach this Teacher in order to be taught the love, affection and charity which is without defect. Love is a disposition which is pleased and satisfied with the thing loved; affection is a selection and separation of the beloved from others of the same kind; and charity implies in addition to these a high appreciation and esteem for the goodness of the beloved. All this we will learn from the Mother of this beautiful love, who is called by that name precisely because her love possesses all these qualities. In Her we learn to love God for his own sake, reposing in Him with all our heart and affections, and giving Him a separate place from all the rest who are not the highest Good himself, for we love God less if we love anything else together with Him. We learn to appreciate Him and esteem Him above gold and above all precious things, for in comparison with Him all precious things are vile, all beauty is ugliness, and all that is great and estimable in carnal eyes becomes contemptible and without any value. I shall speak of the effects of this love of most holy Mary in this entire History, and of these effects heaven and earth are full; hence I will not stay to describe more particularly what no human tongue nor words of men or angels can convey.

*INSTRUCTION OF THE QUEEN OF HEAVEN.*

527. My daughter, if I desire in maternal affection for thee to follow me and imitate me in all the other virtues, then more especially do I make known and declare to thee my desire to see thee follow me in the virtue of charity, for this is the end and the crowning glory of all other virtues. I desire thee to exert thy utmost powers to copy in thy soul with the greatest perfection all thou hast learned of my charity. Light up the lamp of thy faith and reason in order to find this drachma of infinite value (Lk. 15:8), and after thou hast found it forget and despise all that is earthly and corruptible. In thy own mind consider again and again, ponder and take heed of the infinite reasons and causes which make God lovable above all other things. So thou mayest be sure thou lovest Him perfectly and truly, search within thyself for the following signs and effects of that love: Whether thy thoughts and meditations dwell continually on God; whether his commands and counsels find in thee no repugnance or remissness; whether thou fearest to offend Him; whether thou seekest immediately to appease Him after having offended Him; whether thou dost grieve to see Him offended and dost rejoice to see Him served by all creatures; whether thou desirest and art delighted to speak continually of his love; whether thou dost delight in the memory of his presence; whether thou dost grieve at thy forgetfulness of Him and at his absence from thee; whether thou lovest what He loves, and dost abhor what He abhors; whether thou seekest to draw all men towards his friendship and grace; whether thou prayest with confidence; whether thou receivest with gratitude his benefits; whether thou dost not waste them but rather dost turn them to good account for his honor and glory; whether thou dost strive to extinguish in thyself all the movements of the passions which retard thee or hinder thee in thy loving aspirations and works of virtue.

528. All these and many more are the signs of greater or less charity in the soul. When charity is ardent and strong it will be especially careful not to suffer the forces of the soul to remain idle,

nor consent to any blemish, because it will immediately consume and wipe it out. It will not rest until it can taste the highest Good which it loves, for without Him the soul faints, is wounded and sick. It thirsts after that wine which inebriates the heart (Cant. 5:1), causing a forgetfulness of all that is corruptible and passing. And since charity is the mother and the root of all virtue, its fecundity will immediately show itself as soon as it has found a place in the soul; it will fill it and adorn it with the habits of the other virtues, and engender them one after another by establishing the practice of them, as the Apostle says (I Cor. 13:4ff.). The soul which remains in charity not only possesses the effects of this virtue by which it loves the Lord, but being in charity it is loved by God himself;\* it receives from the divine love the mutual effect from God who remains in the one He loves, for the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost come and live in the soul as their temple,<sup>†</sup> a blessing so supreme that neither words nor example can properly express it in this mortal life.

529. The order of this virtue is to first love God, who is above all creation, then to love oneself, and after to love him who is nearest to oneself, namely thy neighbor. God must be loved with the whole understanding without deceit, with the whole will without reserve or division, and with the whole mind without forgetfulness, diminution, negligence or remissness. The motive of charity in loving God is God himself, for He must be loved for his own sake, being the highest Good and infinitely perfect and holy. Loving God for such motives causes the creature to love oneself and one's neighbor, for both belong to one and the same God from whom they derive their origin, life and activity. He who loves God truly for Himself will also love all that is of God and all that in some way participates in his goodness; hence charity looks upon the neighbor as a work and a participation of God, and thus makes no distinction between friend or enemy. Charity looks only upon that which is of God and which pertains to Him in others, no matter whether the neighbor is friendly or hostile, a benefactor or a persecutor. It attends only to the difference in the participation of the divine and infinite goodness, and according to this standard it loves all in God and for God.

530. All other kinds of love, such as loving creatures for less exalted motives, hoping for some kind of reward, advantage or return, or loving them under the cover of disorderly concupiscence, or with a merely human and natural love, even if it would spring from naturally virtuous and well-ordered motives, are not infused charity. Since it is usual in men to be moved by these partial excellences and for selfish and earthly ends, there are few who embrace and appreciate the nobility of this generous virtue and exercise it with proper perfection, for they even seek God and pursue Him for the sake of temporal blessings, or for spiritual benefits and pleasures. I desire thee, my daughter, to drive out of thy heart all these disorderly loves, and live only in well-ordered charity to which the Most High has inclined thy desires. If thou so many times dost reaffirm that this virtue is so beautiful, so pleasing, and so worthy of being sought and esteemed by all creatures, apply thyself to know it in its full excellence, and having come to understand it purchase this precious pearl<sup>Δ</sup> by forgetting and extinguishing in thy heart all love that is not of the most perfect charity. Love no creatures except for God and for what thou dost see in them as coming from God and belonging to Him, in the same manner as a bride loves all the family and servants of the house of her bridegroom because they are his. Do thou forget thy love of any creature which draws thy attention away from God, nor love in any other way except as I have

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\* cf. Jn. 16:27; Gospel, Easter V [Ed.]

† cf. Jn. 14:23 [Ed.]

Δ cf. Mt. 13:46 [Ed.]

asked thee or the Most High has commanded thee to love. Thou shalt also know whether thou lovest with pure charity by thy behavior towards friends and enemies, the naturally agreeable and disagreeable, the polite and the impolite, those who possess or do not possess natural advantages. All this sort of distinction does not come from pure charity but from the natural inclinations and passions of the appetites, which thou must govern, extinguish and eradicate by means of this sublime virtue.