

CHAPTER VII

The Virtue of Hope and how Our Lady the Virgin Practiced It.

503. The virtue of hope naturally follows upon that of faith since it is ordained as its complement; for if the Most High infuses into us the divine light of faith, and if He desires us, without regard to differences of position and age, to come to the infallible knowledge of the Divinity and of his mysteries and promises, it is for no other reason than for each one of us, knowing Him as our last end and happiness, and learning of the means of arriving at it, to engender within himself the vehement desire to reach that goal. This desire, which naturally carries with it the inclination to attain this highest Good, is called hope and is infused into our will or natural appetite in Baptism, for it belongs to the proper activity of the will to strive after eternal happiness as its greatest good and blessing, to make use of divine grace for obtaining it, and to overcome the difficulties which will occur in its pursuit.

504. How excellent the virtue of hope is may be learned from the fact that its ultimate object is God himself, our highest Good. Although it perceives and seeks Him as absent, yet at the same time it also seeks Him as attainable through the merits of Christ and through the proper activity of the one who hopes for it. The acts and operations of this virtue are regulated by the light of divine faith and the prudent reliance on the infallible promises of the Lord. Thus hope, by means of the reasoning powers, maintains the middle road between despair and presumption, so man may neither vainly presume to attain eternal glory on his own powers or without having labored to merit it,* nor if he desires to merit it to fear or fail to trust he can attain it, since the Lord has given his promise and assurance. In this security, guaranteed by divine faith in all that pertains to these things and applied in prudent and sound reasoning, man hopes without fear of being deceived and yet also without presumption.

505. From this it can be seen that despair may arise both from a lack of believing what faith promises and also from a failure to apply to one's own self the security of the divine promises in which one believes but which one falsely supposes as unattainable in one's own regard. Between these two dangerous extremes hope directs us in the safe way, maintaining us in the confident belief on the one hand that God will not deny to ourselves what He has promised to all, and on the other that the promise was not made unconditionally and absolutely, but requires our exertion and effort to merit its fulfillment as far as possible with the help of divine grace. For if God has made man capable of the vision of eternal glory, it was not proper for anyone to attain such felicity by sinful abuse of the very faculties with which he is to enjoy it, but rather use them in relation to the end for which he received them. This relation consists in the exercise of the virtues, which prepares man for the enjoyment of the highest Good, and in seeking Him already in this life by the knowledge and love of God.

506. Now in most holy Mary this virtue of hope reached the highest degree possible both in regard to itself and in regard to all its effects, circumstances and qualities, for the desire and the striving after the last end, which is the vision and fruition of God, was in Her more active than in all other creatures; moreover, this most faithful and prudent Lady did nothing to impede these aspirations, but followed them up with all the perfection possible in a mere creature. Not only did She possess the infused virtue of faith in the promises of our Lord and its concomitant intensity

* cf. *Transfixion* 527 [Ed.]

of hope, but over and above all this She had enjoyed the beatific vision, in which She learned to know by experience the infinite truth and fidelity of the Most High. And though She did not have occasion to make use of hope while enjoying the vision and possession of the Divinity, nevertheless after again resuming her ordinary state She was impelled by the memory of what She had enjoyed to hope and strive after it with so much the greater force and eagerness. Thus the longings of the Queen of all virtues constituted a certain kind of new and singular hope.

507. Another reason why the hope of most holy Mary was greater and above the hope of all the other faithful joined together was the prospective reward and glory of this sovereign Queen (which is the principal object of hope) was far above all the glory of the angels and saints, and according to her knowledge of such glory the Most High would give her was her exalted hope and desire to acquire it. Moreover, so She could attain the highest summit of this virtue and worthily hope for all the powerful arm of God would work in Her, She was appropriately furnished with the light of a supreme faith and all the helps and gifts pertaining thereto, and with a special assistance of the Holy Ghost. And what we have said regarding the principal Object of her supernal hope we must also understand regarding its other objects (which are called secondary), because the blessings, gifts and mysteries operated in this Queen of heaven were so great they could not be enlarged even by the arm of the omnipotent God. Since the great Lady was to receive these favors through the medium of faith and hope, these virtues were proportionately great, and therefore the greatest possible in a mere creature.

508. And if (as has already been said of the virtue of faith [497]) the Queen of heaven was endowed with an explicit knowledge and faith regarding all the revealed truths and all the mysteries and operations of the Most High, and if the acts of hope corresponded to these acts of faith, who except the Lord himself could ever comprehend how many and how excellent were the acts of hope which this Mistress of virtues elicited, since She was aware of her own eternal glory and felicity and of that which was to be wrought in the rest of the evangelical Church by the merits of her most holy Son? God would have formed this virtue of hope even if only for Mary his Mother, as we have said before of the virtue of faith (489), and for her sake yield it, as He has done, to the whole human race.

509. For this reason the Holy Ghost calls Her the *Mother of fair love and of holy hope* (Ecclus. 24:24), for just as She became the Mother of Christ because She furnished Him with the flesh of his body, so the Holy Ghost made Her the Mother of hope because by her special concurrence and cooperation She conceived and brought forth this virtue for the faithful of the Church. Her prerogative of being the Mother of holy hope was connected with and consequent upon being the Mother of Jesus Christ our Lord, for She knew that in her Son She would lay the foundation of all the security of our hope. Because of these conceptions and births of the most holy Queen She obtained a certain dominion and sovereignty over these graces and the promises of the Most High which depended upon the death of Christ her Son for their fulfillment. When She of her own free will conceived and gave birth to the incarnate Word, She turned them all over to us and thereby gave birth to our hope. Thus was accomplished in its legitimate sense that which the Holy Ghost said of Her, *thy plants are a paradise* (Cant. 4:13), for all that came forth from this Mother of Grace was to constitute our happiness, our paradise, and our certain hope of being able to attain them.

510. The Church has a celestial and true Father in Jesus Christ, for He engendered and founded it by his merits and labors, and enriched it with his graces, his example, and his doctrines, as was to be expected from the Father and Author of such an admirable work. Therefore it was proper for the Church to have also a loving and kind Mother, who with sweet regalement and caresses,

and with maternal solicitude and assistance, would nurse the little children at her breast (I Cor. 3:2) and nourish them with tender and delicious food as long as they could not in their infancy bear the food of the robust and strong. This sweet Mother was most holy Mary, who since the beginning of the Church, when the law of grace was born in her yet tender children, began to give forth the sweet milk of her enlightened teaching as a merciful Mother, and who will continue to the end of the world* thus to assist and intercede for the new children which Christ our Lord engenders every day by his merits and at the petitions of this Mother of Mercy. By Her they are born, and She raises and nourishes them. She is our sweet Mother, our life and our hope, the original of that which we have, the Exemplar whom we must imitate, hoping through her intercession to follow Her into the eternal happiness her Son has merited for us, attaining it through the helps communicated to us through Her.

INSTRUCTION OF THE MOST HOLY VIRGIN MARY.

511. My daughter, by the two virtues of faith and hope, as with two relentless wings, my spirit raised its flight, seeking the endless and highest Good, until it rested in the union of his intimate and perfect love. Many times I tasted and enjoyed the clear vision and fruition of God; yet as this benefit was not continuous in my state of a mere viator, I exercised faith and hope, which remained with me outside of the beatific vision and possession, and immediately came to mind upon cessation of the vision, without any other interruption in their operations. The effects which these virtues wrought in me, and the affection, striving and longing they caused in my spirit to arrive at the eternal possession of the divine fruition, cannot be adequately comprehended by the created understanding in its present limited state, but shall be known in God with eternal praise in those who shall merit to rejoice in his vision in heaven.

512. And since thou, my dearest, hast received such light regarding the excellence of this virtue and the works which I performed by it, labor without ceasing to imitate me according to the powers of divine grace. Renew continually and confer within thyself the promises of the Most High, and with the certainty of the faith thou hast in his truthfulness raise thy heart with ardent desire, yearning to obtain them. With this firm hope thou canst promise thyself, through the merits of my most holy Son, that thou shalt come to be an inhabitant in the celestial fatherland, and a companion of all those who in it gaze with immortal glory upon the face of the Most High. And if by the help of this hope thou hast thou dost raise thy heart above earthly things, and keep thy whole mind fixed upon the unchangeable Good for whom thou dost sigh, all that is visible shall be burdensome and vexing;† thou shalt judge them as abhorrent and contemptible, and be unable to crave anything except that most amiable and delightful Object of thy desires. In my soul there was an ardor of hope as one who had by faith believed Him and by experience enjoyed Him, and which no tongue or words can describe or express.

513. Beyond this, in order to motivate thee still more, consider and weep with inmost sorrow over the unhappiness of so many souls who are images of God and capable of his glory, yet due to their sins are deprived of the true hope of enjoying Him. If the children of the holy Church would pause in their vain thoughts, and stop to consider and weigh the benefit of having been given infallible faith and hope, separating them from darkness,^Δ and distinguishing them

* cf. Ecclus. 24:46-7 [Ed.]

† cf. Eccles. 1:14 [Ed.]

Δ cf. Eph. 5:8 [Ed.]

(without their meriting it) with this mark by which they leave behind blind unbelief, they would without doubt be ashamed of their most apathetic forgetfulness and repudiate their foul ingratitude. Yet let them be undeceived, for most terrible torments await them. They are most abhorrent to God and the saints for the contempt they have for the blood shed by Christ, in virtue of which these benefits have been granted to them; as if these benefits were mere fables* they despise the fruit of the truth, running the entire course of their life without stopping for one day, and many of them not even an hour, to consider their obligations and their danger. Weep, O soul, over this lamentable damage, and according to thy strength work and pray to my most holy Son for the remedy, and believe that whatever vigilance and diligence thou dost exert for this purpose shall be rewarded by His Majesty.

* cf. II Peter 1:16 [Ed.]