

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, as with two indefatigable wings my spirit raised its flight by means of faith and hope toward the endless and highest Good, until it rested in union with God through intimate and perfect love. Many times I tasted and enjoyed the clear vision and fruition of Him, but since these blessings were not continuous in my state of pilgrimage I supplied their place by the exercise of faith and hope. They remained with me during my visions and fruitions, and immediately became active during their absence, preventing any cessation in my high aspirations. The effects which these virtues wrought in me, and the affection, striving and longing by which they prompted my soul to attain 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 and cause eternal praise in those who shall merit to rejoice in his vision in heaven.

512. Thou, my dearest, having received such great enlightenment concerning the excellence of this virtue and the works which I practiced by its help, must work 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 unshaken confidence in their divine truthfulness raise thy heart to ardent desires and longings for their attainment. In this firm hope thou canst promise thyself, through the merits of my most holy Son, of coming 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. With the aid of hope thou canst raise thy heart above earthly things and fix thy mind upon the immutable Good for whom thou dost aspire; all visible things shall appear to thee burdensome and disagreeable, and thou shalt esteem them as vile and contemptible; thou shalt strive after nothing except that most lovable and delightful Object of thy desires. In my soul there was an ardor of hope as of one who had by faith believed Him and by experience had enjoyed Him, and no tongue or words can describe or express its intensity.

513. Beyond this, in order to spur thee on still more consider and deplore with heartfelt sorrow the unhappiness of so many souls who are images of God and capable of his glory, yet through their own fault 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 blessing of having been given infallible faith and hope, separating them from darkness,[†] and distinguishing them (without

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

† cf. Eph. 5:8 [Ed.]

their merit) with this emblem by which they leave behind blind unbelief, they would without doubt be ashamed of their most apathetic forgetfulness and repudiate their vile ingratitude. Yet let them be undeceived, for most terrible punishments await them; they are most detestable in the sight of God and the saints, because they despise the blood shed by Christ for the very purpose of gaining for them these blessings. As if all were mere fables* they treat with contempt the blessings of truth, hastening about during their whole life without spending even one day, and many of them not even an hour, in the consideration of their duties and their danger. Weep, O soul, over this lamentable evil, and according to thy power work and pray for its extirpation through my most holy Son, and believe that whatever exertion and attempt thou dost make toward this purpose shall be rewarded by His Majesty.

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