

CHAPTER VI

The Virtue of Faith and how Most Holy Mary Practiced It.

486. In few words St. Elizabeth described the greatness of the faith of most holy Mary when, as reported to us by the evangelist St. Luke (1:45), she exclaimed: *Blessed art thou that hast believed*, because the words and promises of the Lord shall be fulfilled in Thee. By the felicity and blessedness of this great Lady, and by her ineffable dignity, must be measured her faith, since it was such and so excellent that having believed She attained the greatest grandeur outside of God himself. Among all sacraments and mysteries She believed that greatest sacrament, the Incarnation, was to be fulfilled in Her. Such was the prudence and divine science of Mary our Lady in giving credence to this truth so new and never before seen that it transcended all human and angelic understanding, and only in the divine mind could her faith be forged as in the workshop of the immense power of the Most High, where all the virtues of this Queen were fabricated by the arm of His Highness. I always find myself halted and dumbfounded in speaking of these virtues, and more particularly the interior ones, since the light and intelligence which has been given me regarding them is great, yet too limited are human terms to describe the concepts and acts of faith which were engendered in her understanding and spirit, She who was the most faithful of all creatures, or rather She who was greater in faith than all of them taken together. I will say what I can, acknowledging my inability to say what I desire, and much more, what is due to the reality.

487. The faith of most holy Mary was a wonder of all created nature and an open prodigy of the divine power, for in Her the virtue of faith existed in the highest and most perfect degree possible; in a certain manner and to a great extent it made up for the lack of faith among men. The Most High has given this excellent virtue to mortals so in spite of their carnal and mortal nature they can have the knowledge of the Divinity and his mysteries and admirable works, a knowledge so certain* and infallibly secure it is like seeing Him face to face, just like the vision of the blessed angels; the same Object and the same truth which they see openly we perceive obscured under the veil of faith.

488. Considering this magnificent benefit of faith, poorly known and even less appreciated by mortals, it can well be understood (by looking upon the world) how many nations, reigns and provinces have demerited this blessing from the beginning of the world; how many have unhappily cast it aside after the Lord had granted it to them in his generous mercy; and how many of the faithful, having without their merit received the gift of faith, neglect and despise it, letting it lie idle and unproductive for the last end toward which it is to direct and guide them. Thus it was proper for the divine equity to have some recompense for such a lamentable loss, and for such an incomparable benefit to find an adequate and proportionate return as far as possible from creatures; it was appropriate for there to be found at least one creature in whom the virtue of faith would come to its fullest perfection as an example and rule for the rest.

489. All this was found in the great faith of most holy Mary, and solely because of Her and for Her (if this Lady alone was in the world) it would have been most proper for God to devise and create the excellent virtue of faith, since only most pure Mary paid the debt to divine Providence which according to our way of understanding could not be paid by man; moreover, the purpose

* cf. I Cor. 9:26 [Ed.]

of faith would not be frustrated in the purpose of its formation by the curtailed correspondence with it which mortals would show. The faith of this sovereign Queen was to make recompense for their default, and She was to copy the divine ideal of this virtue in its highest perfection. All the other faithful can measure and gauge themselves by the faith of this Lady, for they will be more or less faithful the more or less they approach the perfection of her incomparable faith. Therefore She was set as the Teacher and example of all the believing, including the Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles, Martyrs, and all who have believed or will believe in the articles of the Christian faith to the end of the world.

490. Someone might raise the difficulty how it could be possible for the Queen of heaven to exercise faith, supposing She many times had the beatific vision of the Divinity, and many more times was favored with abstractive visions which likewise make evident that which is perceived by the understanding, as was said above (228, 236) and which I shall later repeat many times. The doubt arises because *faith is the substance of things to be hoped for, and the evidence of things that appear not* (Heb. 11:1), as the Apostle says, which tells us that while we are wayfarers on earth we have no other presence, substance or essence of the things for which we now hope regarding the last end of blessedness beyond that which faith contains in its object which we see obscurely and as it were *through a glass*.^{*} It is the force of this infused habit drawing us to believe what we do not see, and the infallible certitude of what is believed, which present those strong motives for prompting the will to strive for what it desires and hopes. According to this doctrine it seems if the most holy Virgin had ever enjoyed the vision and possession of God (for these two are one) She was deprived of the obscurity necessary for the existence of faith in the things which She had seen face to face, especially if her understanding retained the images of what She had seen in the intuitive or open vision of the Divinity.

491. However, this experience was not only no hindrance to the faith of most holy Mary, but rather magnified and elevated it to its pinnacle, since the Lord desired his Mother to be so wonderfully distinguished in this virtue of faith (and likewise in the virtue of hope) that She would transcend all the common order of virtues of the other wayfarers, and by her excellent understanding would be the Teacher and Artificer of these great virtues, being enlightened sometimes by the most perfect acts of faith and hope, and at other times by the vision and possession (though temporary) of the very end and Object for which She had believed and hoped. Thus She was prepared by her personal experience and fruition to teach the faithful to believe what She herself had seen and enjoyed. To join these two things in the most holy soul of Mary was easy for the power of the Almighty; it was due to her dignity as his most pure Mother, and so it must be done. No privilege, however great, was unbecoming to Her, and in Her none must be lacking.

492. It is true that the clear vision of a mystery is incompatible with the obscurity of the faith by which we believe it, and the possession of a thing excludes the hope of it. Hence most holy Mary, whenever these high mysteries were shown to Her by evident intuition or intellectual abstractions, did not exercise the obscure acts or habits of faith, for on those occasions She could make use only of her infused science. But the theological virtues of faith and hope did not therefore remain idle all the time of her life, for the Lord, in order to give Her the possibility of exercising them, suspended the influx and activity of the clear and evident vision, thereby causing a cessation of the effects of infused knowledge and making room for the obscurity of faith, hiding Himself from Her by taking away all clear evidence of Himself from her mind. This

* cf. I Cor. 13:12 [Ed.]

happened in the most exalted mystery of the Incarnation as I shall relate in its place (*Inc.* 119, 133).

493. It was not proper for the Mother of God to be deprived of the reward of the infused virtues of faith and hope, yet in order to gain this reward it was necessary to merit it, and in order to merit it She must have practiced these virtues in proportion to the reward. Just as her merits were great beyond compare, so the faith in each and every one of the acts of this exalted Lady was correspondingly great, for She perceived and accepted explicitly all the truths of the Catholic religion with the deepest and most perfect faith as a wayfarer. Manifestly the understanding, as soon as it sees the proper evidence for that which it perceives, does not wait for the consent of the will in order to believe, for before it can receive the command of the will it has already been compelled to accept the truth by its evidence; hence the act of believing what cannot be denied is not meritorious. When most holy Mary assented to the message of the Archangel, She merited an ineffable reward due to the act of faith necessary to believe such a deep mystery, and the same was true of other acts of faith when the Most High disposed that She use infused faith but not infused knowledge, although this latter in Her was also meritorious because of the love with which She exercised it, as I have said in different places (230, 379, 382).

494. Just as little did She use the gift of infused science when She lost the divine Child, at least not in order to find the place where He tarried, though this was possible to Her in many other things. She did not then make use of the clear images of the Divinity; also not at the foot of the Cross, because the Lord restricted those visions and operations of her most holy soul which would have prevented sorrow. It was proper for Her to feel it and be left to the strength of her faith and hope alone. The joy occasioned by any of her visions or intelligences of the Divinity (even if only abstractive) would naturally prevent pain unless God wrought a new miracle to unite pain with joy. It was not proper for His Majesty to work this miracle, since by her suffering the Queen of heaven compassionated her most holy Son, and her merit and imitation of Him were to be commensurate with the graces and excellence of the Mother. Therefore She sought the Child sorrowfully, as She herself says (Lk. 2:48), and with living faith and hope, and the same virtues were also active in witnessing the Passion and Resurrection of her beloved Son. During those times She depended upon the Catholic faith, which then became as it were restricted and confined to Her as its Mistress and Foundress.

495. Three qualities or excellences must in particular be mentioned in speaking of the faith of most holy Mary: Its continuity, its intensity, and the intelligence with which it was exercised. The continuity was suspended only during those times in which She enjoyed the clearness of the intuitive and the evidence of the abstractive visions of the Divinity. Though only the Lord himself who dispensed them could know when She put into operation the one or the other kind of acts, yet the most holy Queen, in exercising the different kinds of spiritual activity, never allowed her understanding to remain idle for one instant of her life, and from the first moment of her Immaculate Conception She never lost sight of God; for when She suspended faith it was because She was enjoying the clear vision of the Divinity through the most exalted infused knowledge, and as soon as the Lord interrupted this clear vision She renewed the memory of his presence by her faith. The interchange and succession of these acts produced in the mind of most holy Mary an exquisite harmony, to which the Most High called the attention of the angels when He said in chapter VIII of the Canticles: *Thou that dwellest in the gardens, the friends hearken; make me hear thy voice* (Cant. 8:13).

496. In regard to the intensity or efficacy of the faith of this sovereign Princess, it is certain it exceeded that of the Apostles, Prophets and Saints taken together, and reached the highest degree

possible in a creature. It not only exceeded the faith of all true believers, but She supplied the faith that was lacking in all those who have not believed, and She could by her faith enrich them all. Thus her faith remained firm, immovable and constant when the Apostles in the hour of the Passion fell away. And if all the temptations, deceits, errors and falsehoods of the world were joined together, they could not prevail or disturb the invincible faith of the Queen of the faithful; She, the Foundress and Teacher of faith, would vanquish them all and issue forth victorious and triumphant.

497. The intelligent love with which She explicitly believed all the divine truths cannot be expressed in words without misrepresenting its intensity. Most holy Mary knew all that She believed and believed all that She knew, for the infused theological knowledge of the credibility of the mysteries of faith, and the understanding of this credibility, existed in the most wise Virgin Mother in the highest degree possible in a mere creature. She kept her knowledge in constant action, and by means of her memory, like that of an angel, She never forgot what She had once apprehended. This gift and faculty of the understanding She kept in constant operation in order to exercise her deep faith; only at times, as already said, God suspended faith by other acts of the mind (492, 495). Outside of not being a comprehensor, She had in the state of a viator the most exalted and immediate intelligence in believing and knowing God by her clear knowledge of the Divinity within the scope of faith, by which She transcended all other viators, being alone in a class and condition which no one else can attain.

498. And if most holy Mary, while She exercised the acts of faith and hope, was in what could be called her most ordinary and therefore the lowest degree of activity, and if in that state She excelled all the angels and saints in merits by her faith and love, what must we say of the excellence of her acts, her merits, and her affections during the time in which She was exalted by the divine power to the blessed state of highest intuitive vision and clear knowledge of the Divinity? If this is beyond the comprehension of the angelic mind, how can an earthly creature ever hope to find words to describe it? I therefore can only express the mere desire that all mortals come to the knowledge of the precious value of faith by learning it from this heavenly Exemplar, in whom faith attained its ultimate perfection and where it completely fulfilled the end for which it was created. Let the infidels, heretics, pagans and idolaters approach this Teacher of faith, most holy Mary, in order to be enlightened in their falsehoods and darksome errors, and find the sure way toward the last end of their being. Let also Catholics approach and learn to understand the copious reward of this excellent virtue, and ask with the Apostles for the Lord to increase their faith (Lk. 17:5), not in order to attain the faith of most holy Mary but to imitate and follow Her in it, since by her faith She teaches us and gives us hope that we may attain this virtue through her most exalted merits.

499. St. Paul calls the patriarch Abraham *the father of all them that believe* (Rom. 4:11) because he was the first one who received the promises of the Messiah, believing and hoping against hope (Ib. 18). He desires to extol the excellence of the faith of the Patriarch because he immediately believed the promises of the Lord, when humanly speaking he could not hope in the power of natural causes for his wife Sarah to bear him a son, since she was sterile. Afterward, in offering Isaac in sacrifice as God had commanded, he relinquished the innumerable succession which the Lord had promised him (Gen. 15:5). All of this, and other words and promises of the Lord, were impossible according to nature, yet Abraham believed the divine power could execute them in a supernatural manner. Therefore he merited to be called the Father of all the faithful and receive the seal of faith which justified him, namely circumcision.

500. But Mary, our supereminent Lady, possesses much greater rights and titles to be called the Mother of faith and of all the faithful. In her hand is hoisted the standard and ensign of faith for all the believers in the law of grace. First indeed according to the order of time was the Patriarch, and consequently he was ordained to be the father and head of the Hebrew people; great was his belief in the promises concerning Christ our Lord and in the works of the Most High. Nevertheless, incomparably more admirable was the faith of Mary in all these regards, and She excels him in dignity. Greater difficulty and incompatibility was there that a virgin would conceive and bring forth than an aged and sterile woman; and the patriarch Abraham was not so certain of the sacrifice of Isaac as most holy Mary was of the inevitable sacrifice of her most holy Son. She is the One who perfectly believed and hoped in all the mysteries, and She shows to the whole Church how it must believe in the Most High and in the works of the Redemption. Having thus understood the faith of Mary our Queen, we must admit Her to be the Mother of the faithful and the prototype of the Catholic faith and of holy hope. And in order to conclude this chapter I will add that Christ, our Redeemer and Teacher, since He was a comprehensor and his most holy soul enjoyed the highest glory and the beatific vision, had no necessity or occasion for faith, nor could He in his own actions give us an example of this virtue. But what the Lord could not do in his own Person He did in the person of his most holy Mother, constituting Her as the Foundress, the Mother, and the example of faith in his evangelical Church. Thus on Judgment Day this sovereign Mistress and Queen shall in a special manner assist her most holy Son in the judgment of those who in spite of such an example have not believed during their stay on earth.

INSTRUCTION OF THE MOTHER OF GOD, OUR LADY.

501. My daughter, the inestimable treasure of the virtue of divine faith is hidden to those mortals who have only carnal and earthly eyes, for they do not know how to appreciate and esteem a gift and blessing of such incomparable value. Consider, my dearest, what the world was without faith and what it would be today if my Son and Lord would not preserve faith. How many men whom the world has celebrated as great, powerful and wise have precipitated themselves because of the lack of the light of faith from the darkness of their unbelief into most abominable sins, and thence into the eternal darkness of hell! How many kingdoms and provinces, being blind themselves, follow these still more blind leaders until they together fall into the abyss of eternal pains!* And these are followed by the bad Christians, who having received the grace and blessing of faith live as if they had it not in their hearts.

502. Do not forget, my dear friend, to be grateful for this precious pearl which the Lord has given thee as a pledge and link of the espousal which thou hast celebrated with Him, in order to draw thee to the bridal chamber of his holy Church, and afterwards to his eternal beatific vision. Continually exercise this virtue of faith, for it places thee near to thy last end for which thou dost strive, and brings thee near to the Object of thy desires and thy love. Faith teaches the sure way of eternal salvation; it is the light which shines in the darkness of this mortal life and pilgrimage; it leads men securely to the possession of the fatherland to which they are travelling if they do not allow it to die out by infidelity and sinfulness. Faith enlivens the other virtues and serves as a nourishment of the just man and a support in his labors. Faith confounds and fills with fear the infidels and the lax Christians in their negligence, for it convinces them in this world of their sin and threatens punishment in the life to come. Faith is powerful to do all things, for nothing is

* cf. Mt. 15:14 [Ed.]

impossible to the believer; faith makes all things attainable and possible (Mk. 9:22). Faith illumines and ennobles the understanding of man, since it directs him in the darkness of his natural ignorance not to stray from the way, and it elevates him above himself so he sees and understands with infallible certainty what is far above his powers, and assures him of it no less than if he saw it clearly before him. He is thus freed from the gross and vile narrow-mindedness of those who will believe only what they can experience by their own limited natural powers, not considering that the soul, as long as it lives in the prison of his corruptible body, is very much circumscribed and limited in its sphere of action by the knowledge drawn from the coarse activity of the senses. Appreciate therefore, my daughter, this priceless treasure of the Catholic faith given thee by God; watch over it and practice it in great esteem and reverence.