

CHAPTER V

The Most Perfect Degree of the Virtues of Most Holy Mary in General, and how She Put Them into Practice.

479. Virtue is a habit which ennobles and adorns the rational powers of the creature, and inclines him toward doing good. It is called a habit because it is a permanent quality which is difficult to separate from the faculties of the soul, and is different from a virtuous act which is not permanent but passes away. Virtue inclines and facilitates the operations of the soul toward the good. This quality is not inherent in the faculties themselves, for they are indifferent toward good or evil. Most holy Mary was adorned from the first instant of her life with all virtues in a most eminent degree, and they were continually augmented by new graces and by new perfection which She practiced. All the virtues and merits which the hand of the Lord had showered upon Her She brought to their fullest perfection.

480. Although the faculties of this Lady and sovereign Princess were in no sense subject to disorder, nor to any of the repugnance which other children of Adam must first overcome (for sin had not touched Her, nor the leaven of sin* which draws toward evil and resists the good), yet by virtuous habits these already well-ordered faculties were capable of being inclined more and more to what was most perfect, holy and praiseworthy. Moreover She was a mere creature capable of suffering, and as such She was also subject to pain, to the inclination toward licit repose, and to the inertia disinclining Her toward the performance of some supererogatory works which without sin She could have omitted. In order to overcome this natural disinclination and repugnance She was assisted by habits of the most exalted virtues, and thus this Queen of heaven vanquished this repugnance without any weakness and was in no way hindered in pursuing the utmost perfection in all her works.

481. Due to this beauty and harmony regarding the habits of virtue the soul of most holy Mary was so enlightened, ennobled, and entirely inclined to the good and to the last end of the creature, and so alert, prompt, efficient and joyful in the practice of virtue, that if it was possible for our weak insight to penetrate into the interior of her sacred soul we would find there a more wonderful beauty than that of all creatures combined, and inferior only to the beauty of God himself. All this was in most pure Mary as in their own center and sphere, and all virtues reached in Her the highest perfection, and thus in no way could it ever be said of Her this or that virtue is lacking in order to make Her altogether beautiful and perfect. Besides the infused virtues She possessed all the acquired ones, which She augmented by practice and exercise. In other souls one single act cannot be called virtue, because many repeated acts are necessary to constitute virtue; but in most holy Mary each act was so efficacious, intense and consummate that each one was superior to the virtues of all the other creatures. According to this, when such virtuous acts were so often repeated, without loss of the least point or degree of the most perfect efficacy, what habits would those be which this heavenly Lady acquired by her own works? The end for which something is done is also that which makes the act virtuous (because it is good and performed well); in Mary our Lady this end was the highest possible, namely God himself, for She did nothing in which She was not certain to advance the greater glory and pleasure of the Lord, and She looked upon this as the motive and ultimate end of all her actions.

* cf. I Cor. 5:8; Epistle for Easter Sunday [Ed.]

482. The two kinds of virtues, the infused and the acquired, are founded upon a third kind, called natural virtue; this is born within us as part of our rational nature and is called *synteresis*. It is a certain knowledge of the first foundations and principles of virtue, perceived by the light of reason, and a certain inclination in the will corresponding to this light. Such, for instance, is the sentiment that we must love those who do us good, or not do unto others what we do not wish to be done to ourselves, etc. The most holy Queen possessed this natural virtue or *synteresis* in the most superlative degree, so from the natural principles She drew all their consequences and relations up to the universal Good, though ever so remote, for She reasoned from these first principles with most profound insight and incredible swiftness and accuracy. To arrive at these conclusions She availed Herself of her infused knowledge of created things, especially of the more noble and vast ones, the heavens, the sun, the moon and stars, the arrangement of all the heavenly bodies and of the elements. Taking in their whole scope from beginning to end, She invited these creatures to praise their Creator and commanded them, as far as was in them, to raise and draw men toward their God until they would arrive at the knowledge of the Creator and Author of all.

483. The infused virtues are divided into two classes. To the first belong only those which have God himself for their immediate object; therefore they are called theological virtues, being faith, hope and charity. To the second class belong all those other virtues which have as their proximate object some means or some honorable good which advances the soul toward its last end, namely God. These are called the moral virtues because they are intimately connected with established customs, and though they are many in number they can be reduced to four, which are called the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance. Later I shall say what I can regarding all of these virtues and their different species in order to make clear how all of them and each one in particular adorned the faculties of most holy Mary. At present I only mention in general that none of them was lacking in Her, and that all were possessed by Her in the most perfect manner; moreover, they were supplemented by all the gifts and fruits of the Holy Ghost and the beatitudes. God did not fail to infuse into Her from the first moment of her Conception all the graces and gifts conducive to the highest beauty of the human soul and faculties, and this was true of the will as well as the understanding, and thus She had the knowledge as well as the habit of the sciences. In order to say it all at one time: All the good which the Most High could give Her as the Mother of his Son and as a mere creature He conferred upon Her in the most exalted degree. In addition to all this her virtues continually grew, the infused virtues because She added to them by her own merits, and the acquired virtues because She nurtured and multiplied them by the intensity of her meritorious acts.

INSTRUCTION OF OUR LADY, THE MOTHER OF GOD.

484. My daughter, the Most High communicates to all mortals without distinction the light of the natural virtues. To those who dispose themselves by means of them and by his graces He concedes also the infused virtues at the time of their justification. Since He is the Author of nature and grace He distributes these gifts with greater or less abundance according to his equity and pleasure. In Baptism He infuses the virtues of faith, hope and charity, and with them He infuses other virtues, so the creature can exert himself and labor for what is good, not only preserving within himself those received in the Sacraments but acquiring others by his own merits and exertions. This is the highest joy and happiness of men, that they correspond to the love which the Creator and Redeemer shows them, adorning their souls, and by the infused

habits familiarizing themselves with the virtuous exercise of their own will; but the failure to correspond to such an inestimable benefit makes them extremely unhappy, because in this disloyalty consists the first great victory of the demon over man.

485. I desire thee, soul, to exercise thyself and cooperate with the natural and the supernatural gifts of virtue with an unceasing diligence, and acquire the habits of other virtues which thou must augment by the frequent exercise of those which God has so generously and graciously communicated to thee. The infused gifts, joined to the virtues nurtured and attained by the soul itself, are an adornment and acquisition of marvelous beauty, and very pleasing in the eyes of the Most High. I remind thee also, my dearest, that the Almighty has been so generous in conferring these blessings on thy soul, and has enriched it with such great treasures of grace, that if thou art ungrateful thy sin and the charge against thee shall be greater than many generations. Consider and take notice of the nobility of the virtues, how they enlighten and beautify the soul by themselves, and even if there was no other end or consequent reward the possession of them would be great due to their inherent excellence. Yet that which exalts the virtues beyond all comparison is having for their ultimate end God himself, who seeks them in souls for the perfection and truth which virtues contain in themselves; and by these virtues the creature attains such an exalted reward as to possess God himself, who is its happiness and blessedness.