

CHAPTER XII

The Virtue of Temperance Possessed by Mary Most Holy.

580. Regarding the two movements which the creature has in withdrawing from evil and striving after the sensible good, the latter is regulated by fortitude, which as already demonstrated serves to strengthen the will against the immoderate exercise of the irascible faculties and inspires it with bold daring to suffer all possible afflictions of the senses rather than desist from the attainment of the good. The other tendency, founded on the concupiscible faculties, is regulated by *temperance*, and this is the last and the least of the cardinal virtues, for the good which it procures is not so universal as that attained by the practice of other virtues, since temperance is directly concerned only with the particular advantage of its possessor. The Doctors and Masters treat of temperance from another aspect, namely insofar as it can regulate the actions of all the natural appetites of man; in this respect temperance is a general and universal virtue which comprises within its scope the proper exercise of all the virtues according to reason. We do not at present speak of this general virtue of temperance, but only of that temperance which serves to regulate the concupiscence of touch and other pleasurable concupiscences indirectly related to the touch but not presenting such powerful attractions as the concupiscence of the flesh.

581. In this regard temperance holds the last place among the virtues, its aim being less noble than that of others; yet in other regards it may be said to have greater excellence insofar as it turns man away from intentions most foul and abhorrent, namely intemperance regarding the sensible pleasures which are common to men and the irrational animals. Referring to this David says that man has become like unto the beasts (Ps. 48:13, 21), allowing himself to be carried away by the pleasure of the senses. Intemperance is rightly called a puerile vice, for just as a child is not guided by reason but by the spur of fancy, and does not restrain himself except through fear of chastisement, so also concupiscence cannot otherwise be checked in the indulgence of its desires. From this dishonor and vileness man is freed by the virtue of temperance, which teaches him to govern himself not by his desires but by reason. Therefore a certain respectability and decorum or beauty distinguish this virtue by which the reason is enabled to preserve its rule, though the indomitable passions are hardly ever inclined to listen or yield to it willingly. On the contrary, the subjection of man to beastly pleasures is a great dishonor, degrading him to the position of an irrational animal or an unreasoning child.

582. Temperance includes the two virtues of *abstinence* and *sobriety*, the former being opposed to gluttony and the latter to drunkenness. And in abstinence is contained fasting, and these two virtues are of primary importance, for nourishment, being necessary for the preservation of life, is among the principal objects coveted by the appetites. After these follow others which regulate the use of the faculties for the reproduction of the species, such as chastity and susceptibility to shame with their concomitant virtues of *virginity* and *continence*, opposed to the vices of lust and incontinence and their species. Besides these virtues, which are the principal ones belonging to temperance, there are others which regulate the appetite in the less important desires. Those which regulate the sensations of smell, hearing and sight may be classed under those referring to the proper use of the sense of touch. But there are still other kinds of virtues which resemble some of the above, though their object is entirely different, such as *clemency* and *meekness*, which are set to govern anger and wrath in the administration of punishment lest they turn into bestial and inhuman cruelty. Then there is *modesty*, which includes four virtues. The first one is

humility, which keeps down pride lest man seek in a disorderly manner his own exaltation and honor before men. The second is *studiousness*, by which one preserves the proper measure in seeking information, being opposed to vain curiosity. The third is *moderation* or frugality, by which one avoids superfluous expense and ostentation in regard to clothing and exterior living. The fourth is the restraint of overindulgence in pleasurable entertainment, such as playing, bodily exercise, dancing, jesting and the like. Although this virtue seems to have no special name, it is of the greatest importance, and is generally called *modesty* or *temperance*.

583. It always seems to me when I describe the excellence of these and of the other virtues when applied to the corresponding virtues of the Queen of heaven the terms at my disposal and commonly used in order to describe these virtues in other creatures fall far below the truth. The graces and gifts of most holy Mary were in closer correspondence with those of her beloved Son, and these with the divine perfections, than all the virtues and sanctity of the saints are with those of the sovereign Queen of virtues. Hence it no doubt happens that whatever we can say of her virtues by using the terms fit for describing the virtues of the saints seems to fall far short of the truth, for the latter, as great as they may have been, existed in persons disordered and subject to imperfections and the distempers of sin. When therefore Ecclesiasticus says that we can have no true conception of the excellence of the continent man (Ecclus. 26:20), what shall we say regarding the virtue of temperance in the Mistress of all virtues, and of the beauty of that soul which contained the perfection of all virtues? All the domestics of this strong Woman were doubly clothed (Prov. 31:21), because all her faculties were clothed in two vestments or perfections of incomparable beauty and strength: The first was original justice, which subjected all the appetites to reason and grace, and the second was the infused habits, which supplied new beauty and strength for the attainment of the highest perfection in her works.

584. All of the saints who have signalized themselves in the beauty of temperance obtained the full conquest over the indomitable concupiscences by subjecting them in such a manner to the rule of reason as not to allow their desires to reach out after anything that could afterwards occasion them sorrow for having desired it. They advanced so far that they denied themselves all indulgence in those concupiscences which could be withdrawn without destroying human nature. Nevertheless in all these exercises of the virtue of temperance they felt a certain opposition within themselves which retarded the perfect assent of the will, or at least a certain resistance preventing them from reaching the plenitude of perfection in their actions. With the Apostle they complained of the unhappy burden of this body of sin (Rom. 7:24). In most holy Mary no such dissonance could be traced, for without a murmur of the appetites and without a shadow of repugnance of the dictates of her will all her powers acted in such harmony and concert that like armies marching in well ordered squadrons (Cant. 6:3) they moved on in heavenly unison. Since She had no rebellious passions to overcome She exercised such great temperance in all her actions that not even the suggestion of disorder ever entered her mind; on the contrary, her activity so closely imitated the divine operations that they seemed originated and drawn directly from that supreme Original, turning toward Him as the only rule and ultimate end of all her perfections.

585. The *abstinence* and *sobriety* of most holy Mary were the admiration of the angels, for though She was Queen of all creation and experienced the natural passions of hunger and thirst, She never sought after the delicacies which would have suited her high estate, nor ever indulged in nourishment merely for the sake of the pleasures of taste, but only for that which was necessary; and these She satisfied with such temperance that She never exceeded or could exceed the narrow bounds of nourishment necessary to preserve the radical humors of life. Moreover

She partook of nourishment in such a way as to allow room for hunger and thirst, leaving some room for the effects of grace in conjunction with the natural process of bodily nourishment. She never experienced the changes of corruption arising from superfluous eating or drinking, nor did her needs in this regard grow greater on one day than on others, nor was She more subject to these changes because of the lack of food, for if at any time She detracted from the food necessary to keep up the natural warmth She was supplemented in her activity by divine grace in which the creature lives, and not in bread alone (Mt. 4:4). The Lord could have sustained Her without food or drink but He did not do it, for it was not right for Her to lose the merit of virtuously using these things, thus giving us the benefit of her example and merits. Regarding the kind of food and the time in which She partook of it we shall mention these circumstances in different parts of this History (*Inc.* 196, 424; *Tran.* 187). Of her own choice She never ate meat, nor did She eat more than once a day, except when She lived with her spouse Joseph, or when She accompanied her most holy Son in his travels, for in such circumstances, in order to conform Herself to others, She imitated the mode of living followed by the Lord, though at all times She was wonderful in her temperance.

586. Of the *virginal purity* and *modesty* of this Virgin of virgins not even the Seraphim could speak worthily, for in this virtue, though to them it is natural, they were inferior to their Queen and Lady. By the privilege and power of the Most High She was more free from the contrary vice than the angels themselves, who by their very nature could not be touched by impurity. Mortals will never in this life be able to form a proper idea of this virtue as it existed in the Queen of heaven, for we are much weighed down by our heavy earthliness, and the pure and crystalline light of chastity is much obscured in our souls. Our great Queen possessed this virtue in such a degree that She could have honorably preferred it even to the dignity of being the Mother of God* if it was not She who most provided this virtue with its ineffable greatness. Hence, measuring this virginal purity of Mary by the esteem in which She held it and the dignity to which She raised it, we can partly estimate how great was this virtue in her virginal body and soul. She resolved upon virginal purity from the moment of her Immaculate Conception,† promised it from her birth, and observed it in such a manner that She never performed any action, movement or gesture in which She violated anything regarding her modesty. Accordingly She never spoke to any man except at the command of God, nor did She ever look into the face of a man, and not even into the face of a woman; and this not because of any danger to Her but for the sake of gaining merit, for our example, and in order to exercise the superabundance of her heavenly prudence, wisdom and charity.

587. Of her *clemency* and *meekness* Solomon says that the law of clemency is on her tongue (Prov. 31:26). She never moved it except in order to let flow the grace poured out on her lips (Ps. 44:3). Meekness governs anger, and clemency moderates punishment. There was no anger in our most mild Queen, nor did She use the faculty of it except, as we have said above (570ff.), in order to lend fortitude to her activity against sin^Δ and the demon. But against rational creatures She made no use of anger for the purpose of punishing them, nor was She moved to anger by any event, nor did She ever on any account interrupt her most perfect practice of meekness, preserving inimitable and imperturbable equanimity both interiorly and exteriorly; neither did She ever show outward signs of inward anger in her countenance, her voice, or her movements.

* cf. Lk. 1:34 [Ed.]

† cf. *Conception* 292 [Ed.]

Δ cf. Eph. 4:26 [Ed.]

This meekness and clemency the Lord used as his own instrument, letting loose in Her all his benefits and his ancient and everlasting mercies; and for this end it was necessary for the clemency of Mary our Lady to be an instrument proportionate to the clemency which the Lord himself has toward creatures. When we consider attentively and once have understood well the works of the divine mercy toward sinners, and when we see that most holy Mary was a fit instrument of their distribution and application, we will then partly understand the clemency of this Lady. All her corrections were undertaken more by pleading, teaching and admonishing than by chastisement. She herself besought the Lord and He ordained this to be her course of action, for this preeminent Queen was to contain the law of clemency as in the original and depository of which His Majesty would avail Himself, and from which mortals would draw this virtue as well as all the others.

588. To discourse worthily regarding the other virtues, especially of the *humility*, the *frugality*, and the poverty of most holy Mary, many books and the tongues of angels would be required. Of that which I am capable of stating this History is replete, for in all the actions of the Queen of heaven her incomparable humility shines forth over all of her virtues. I fear extremely to understate the greatness of this singular virtue in Her by trying to encompass in the limited terms at my disposal that ocean of humility which was able to receive and embrace the Incomprehensible and the Immense himself. All that the saints and the angels themselves could comprehend and practice of the virtue of humility cannot equal even the least part of the humility which our Queen actually attained. Which of the saints or angels could ever merit the title of Mother of God? And who, besides Mary and the eternal Father, could ever address the incarnate Word as Son? If having in this regard attained to a dignity like that of the eternal Father, and possessing the graces and gifts befitting such a state, She nevertheless placed Herself in her estimation in the last place among creatures, and reputed all as her superiors, what odor, what fragrance did this humble spikenard send forth (Cant. 1:11) for the delight of God himself, enclosing in her bosom the supreme King of kings?

589. It is no wonder the pillars of heaven, the angels, shrink and tremble (Job 26:11) in the presence of the inaccessible light of His infinite Majesty, since they have before their eyes the ruin of their companions while they themselves were confirmed in the advantages and favors common to all. That the most valiant and invincible of the saints humiliate themselves, embracing contempt and reproach,* and acknowledging themselves unworthy of the least favors of grace, and even of the service and aid of the creatures themselves, is only most just and according to the natural order of things, for we have all sinned and infringed upon the glory of God (Rom. 3:23), and no one is so holy that he cannot increase in sanctity, nor so perfect that some virtue is not lacking in him, nor so innocent that the eyes of God can find nothing to reprehend. And if anyone could be of consummate perfection, he nevertheless would still remain within the sphere of the common graces and benefits, since no one is superior to all in all things.

590. Yet precisely for this reason the humility of most pure Mary was without example and without equal; for though She was the dawn of grace, the beginning of all the good of the creatures, the superior over them all, the prodigy of the divine perfections, the center of his love, the sphere of his omnipotence, who called God her Son and was called Mother by God himself, She nevertheless humbled Herself to the lowest place in all creation. She who enjoyed the greatest excellence of all the works of God in a mere creature, with no higher position remaining to which She could be raised, nevertheless humiliated Herself so far as to judge Herself

* cf. Heb. 13:12-13 [Ed.]

unworthy of the least estimation, distinction or honor which would be due to even the least of the rational creatures. Not only did She consider Herself unworthy of the dignity of Mother of God and the graces included in this title, but She considered Herself unworthy of the air She breathed, of the support the earth gave to her footsteps, of the sustenance derived from it, or of any courtesy or service of creatures, and She gave thanks for all as if She was truly so undeserving. In order to say all in a few words: That a creature does not seek the honor which does not belong to him, or which for some reason he does not merit, is not such a great humility, though the Most High in his infinite kindness accepts it and considers Himself under obligation to one who practices it in that way. But what is most admirable is that most holy Mary humbled Herself more than all creatures combined, and while deserving all majesty and exaltation neither craved nor sought it, but being in the form of the worthy Mother of God She annihilated Herself in her own estimation,* meriting by this humility to be raised as it were in justice to the dominion and sovereignty of all creation.†

591. In proportion to this incomparable humility most holy Mary possessed also all the other virtues which belong to *modesty*. The desire of knowing more than is necessary ordinarily arises from a lack of humility and charity. This is a vice not only of no use but of great hindrance in the advancement of virtue, as happened with Dina (Gen. 34:1ff.), who by useless curiosity went out to see what was of no benefit to her and suffered such great damage to her honor. From the same root of proud presumption usually also springs superfluous ostentation and finery in outward dress, and also disorderly behavior in gesture and carriage, which serves sensuality and vanity, testifying to the levity of the heart according to the saying of Ecclesiasticus (19:27): *The attire of the body, and the laughter of the teeth, and the gait of the man, show what he is*. All the virtues opposed to these vices were in most holy Mary in their entirety, void of all disinclination or feebleness in the exercise of them. They were like companions of her profound humility, charity and purity which revealed the certain tokens of a nature more heavenly than earthly.

592. She was most *studious* without being curious, for though She was full of wisdom above that of the Cherubim She studied and allowed Herself to be taught as if ignorant of all things. Whenever She made use of her divine science or sought to learn the will of God, She was so prudent and attended so carefully and exactly to all circumstances that her efforts always wounded the heart of God and drew and inclined Him to fulfill her most well-ordered desires. In poverty and *moderation* She was most admirable, for being the Mistress of all creation and having the full right to dispose of it, She relinquished all into the hands of her most holy Son when He placed all into her hands; for just as the Father placed all things into the hands of the incarnate Word (Jn. 13:3), so the Lord placed all into the hands of his Mother, and She in order to do the same offered all things affectionately and efficaciously for the glory of her Son and Lord. Regarding the modesty of her behavior and the sweetness of her conversation, and of all her exterior actions, it is sufficient to repeat what is asserted by the wise man of Athens, St. Dionysius, that She would have deserved to be looked upon as more than human if faith did not teach that She is a mere creature.

* cf. Philip. 2:6-7 [Ed.]

† cf. Mt. 23:12 [Ed.]

INSTRUCTION OF THE QUEEN OF HEAVEN.

593. My daughter, thou hast said something of the virtue of temperance and of my practice of it insofar as thou hast understood its dignity and excellence. Yet thou hast omitted much that belongs to a full understanding of the necessity of temperance in human actions. It was a punishment of the first sin that man lost the perfect use of reason, and that the passions would rise up in rebellion against him because he rose up against God in contempt of his most just command. In order to repair this damage the virtue of temperance became necessary, which tames the passions, refrains its movements of delectation to which man was yielding, and restores to him the perfect medium in that which is concupiscible, teaching and inclining him anew to follow reason as furnished him by the Divinity, and not merely to follow sensible delights like an irrational beast. Without this virtue it is not possible for man to divest himself of spoiled human nature, nor dispose himself for the graces and wisdom of God, for they will not enter into the soul of one whose body is subject to sins (Wis. 1:4). He who knows how to moderate his passions by denying them their immoderate and bestial desires will be able to say and experience in truth that the King has introduced him into the cellars of his delicious wine (Cant. 2:4), and into the treasure house of his wisdom and spiritual gifts, for this virtue is a storehouse of most beautiful and fragrant virtues for the delight of the Almighty.

594. Though of course I desire thee to labor much in acquiring all virtues pertaining to temperance, I desire nevertheless for thee to consider especially the beauty and fragrance of chastity, the strength which abstinence and sobriety in eating and drinking shall give, the sweet influence of modesty in words and actions, and the exalted nobility of poverty in the use of created things. With the help of these virtues thou shalt attain the divine enlightenment, the peace and tranquility of thy soul, the serenity of thy faculties, and the right government of thy inclinations; thou shalt be entirely illumined with the splendors of divine graces and gifts. From an animal and sensual way of living thou shalt be raised to a heavenly conversation and an angelic life, and that is what I seek in thee and what thou thyself by divine assistance art striving for. Be careful therefore, my dearest, and watch for the divine light in all thy actions, and let not any of thy powers be induced to activity merely by pleasure and inclination, but always act according to reason* and for the glory of the Most High in all things necessary for the conduct of thy life. In eating, sleeping, dressing, speaking, hearing, desiring, correcting, commanding and speaking, let all be governed in thee by the light and pleasure of the Lord God and not by thy own.

595. And so thou mayest grow more fond of the beauty and charm of the virtue of temperance, consider the vileness of its contrary vices, and ponder by the light thou receivest how ugly, abominable, horrible and monstrous the world is in the eyes of God and the saints due to the enormity of such abominations as men commit against this lovable virtue. Notice how some follow like brutes after the horrors of sensuality,[†] how gluttony degrades others, how some follow after the pleasures of play and vanity, how others are dominated by pride and presumption, how many are entangled in avarice and the desire for gain, and how generally they all follow the impulse of their passions, seeking in this life only pleasure, while in the life to come they amass for themselves eternal torments and incur the loss of the beatific vision of their God and Lord.

* cf. Rom. 12:1 [Ed.]

† cf. Jude 10 [Ed.]