

CHAPTER XVII

The Princess of Heaven, Mary Most Holy, Begins to Suffer Affliction in Her Childhood; God Absents Himself from Her; Her Sweet and Loving Complaints.

674. The Most High, who in his infinite wisdom dispenses and regulates the welfare of his beloved ones according to weight and measure (Wis. 11:21), resolved to exercise our heavenly Princess with certain afflictions adapted to her age and state of childhood. Though She was always great in grace, He desired by this means to increase her glory. Entirely filled with grace and wisdom was our child Mary; nevertheless, it was appropriate for Her to learn by experience and thus make advancement and understand better the science of suffering afflictions which only experience can bring to its ultimate perfection and value. During the brief course of her tender years She had enjoyed the delights and caresses of the Most High, the Angels, and her parents, and in the temple the tender love of her teachers and the priests, because in the eyes of all of them She was most gracious and amiable. It was now time for Her to begin to know all the good She possessed in another light and by another knowledge, namely that which is acquired by the absence and privation of the good, and to make use of it for the practice of those virtues which arise from comparison between the state of regalement and caresses with the state of loneliness, aridity and tribulation.

675. The first affliction which our Princess suffered was the Lord suspended the continual visions which He had thus far vouchsafed to Her. Since it was a new and unaccustomed experience, and since the treasure thus withdrawn was high and precious, so much the greater was the sorrow occasioned Her thereby. In addition the holy Angels concealed themselves from Her, and at the withdrawal from her sight of so many, so excellent, and such heavenly beings, which took place all at once (although they did not cease to surround Her invisibly for her protection), that most pure soul seemed to Herself entirely forsaken and left alone in the dark night occasioned by the absence of her Beloved.

676. It was a great surprise to our little Queen, for the Lord, though He had in general prepared Her for the coming of tribulations, had not specified their nature. Since the innocent Heart of the most simple Dove harbored no thoughts and entertained no practical conclusions except such as were conformable to her humility and incomparable love, She explained all according to this same light. In her humility She began to think She had not merited the further presence and possession of the lost good because of her ingratitude, and in her inflamed love She sighed and yearned after Him with such great and loving affection and sorrow that there are no words to express them. She turned with her whole soul to the Lord in this new state and said to Him:

677. "God most high and Lord of all creation, infinite in goodness and rich in mercies, I confess, my Master, that such a vile creature cannot merit thy favors, and my soul in utmost sorrow reproaches itself with its own ingratitude and thy displeasure. If my ingratitude has interposed and eclipsed the Sun which animated, vivified and illumined me, and I have been remiss in the return for so many benefits, I acknowledge, my Lord and Shepherd, the guilt of my great negligence. If as an ignorant and simple little sheep I did not know how to be grateful, nor do what is most acceptable in thy eyes, I am prostrate on the earth, united to the dust, so Thou, my God, who dwellest on high (Ps. 112:5), mayest raise my poverty and destitution (Ib. 7). Thy powerful hands have formed me (Job 10:8), and Thou canst not be ignorant of our frame (Ps. 102:14) and in what kind of a vase Thou hast placed thy treasures. My soul wastes away in its bitterness (Ps. 30:11); and in thy absence, since Thou art its sweetest life, no one can give

encouragement to my fading life. Where shall I go in thy absence? Where shall I turn my eyes without the light which illumines them? Who shall console me, when all is affliction? Who shall preserve me from death, when there is no life left?"

678. She also turned toward the holy Angels and continued without ceasing in her loving complaints, saying to them: "Celestial princes, ambassadors of the great and supreme King of the heights, and most faithful friends of my soul, why have ye also left me? Why do ye deprive me of thy sweet sight and deny me thy presence? But I do not wonder, my lords, at thy irritation, if by my ingratitude I have merited to fall into the disfavor of thy and my Creator. Lights of the heavens, enlighten my understanding in this my ignorance, correct me if I have been at fault, and obtain pardon for me from my Master. Most noble courtiers of the celestial Jerusalem, succor me in my sorrow and dereliction: Tell me where my Beloved is. Tell me where He has hidden Himself (Cant. 3:3). Tell me where I can find Him without roaming about, and without wandering after the flocks of all the creatures (Ib. 1:6). Yet woe is me!, for neither do ye respond to me, though thou art so courteous and expressly know the tokens of my Spouse, since He never withdraws from thee the sight of his face and his beauty."

679. Then She turned toward all the rest of the creatures, and with repeated anxieties of her love She spoke to them and said: "Without doubt thou, being grateful and also armed against the ingrates (Wis. 5:18), art indignant against me, who has not been grateful. But even if by the goodness of the Lord and thy own thou dost permit me to remain in thy midst, though I am the most vile, thou cannot thereby satisfy my longings. Very beautiful and spacious are the heavens; lovely and refulgent are the planets and all the stars; great and mighty are the elements; the earth is adorned and clothed in the fragrant plants and herbs; innumerable are the fishes of the waters; *wonderful are the surges of the sea* (Ps. 92:4); light and swift are the birds; hidden are the minerals; strong are the animals; and all of these together are a continuous ladder and a sweet harmony giving notice of my Beloved. Yet they are but lengthy detours for one who loves Him, and when I course swiftly over them I find myself in the end remaining absent from my Good, and even with the true connection which the creatures give me to his measureless beauty my quest is not quieted, my sorrow is not tempered, my pain is not moderated, my anguish increases, my desire is augmented, my heart is inflamed, and while love is not satiated earthly life fades away. O sweet death in the absence of my life! O sorrowful life in the absence of my very soul and my Beloved! What shall I do? Where shall I turn? How can I live, yet how can I die? Since life fails me, what power sustains me without it? O all ye creatures, who with your ever renewed conservation and perfections give me such tokens of my Master, *attend and see if there be any sorrow like to my sorrow* (Lam. 1:12)!"

680. Our heavenly Lady formed many other such reasonings in her bosom and repeated them in spoken words such as cannot be conceived by other created understanding, for She alone possessed the wisdom and love properly to estimate the meaning of the absence of God in a soul, since She alone had known and enjoyed his presence in its highest beatitude. But if even the angels, in a holy and loving emulation, were filled with admiration to see a mere creature and so tender a Child exercising such a variety of acts of the most prudent humility, faith, love and affection, and such flights of the heart, who can ever explain the pleasure and delight which the Lord himself took in the soul of his chosen One and in her aspirations, each one of which wounded the Heart of His Majesty, and proceeded from greater grace and love than He had placed in the Seraphim themselves? And if they altogether, being in the continual presence of the Divinity, could not exercise or imitate the example given by most holy Mary, nor fulfill the laws of love so perfectly as She in the absence and concealment of her God, what was the satisfaction

of the most blessed Trinity in receiving such love from Her when He hid Himself from Her? This is a mystery hidden to our littleness, but we must reverence it with admiration and admire it with all reverence.

681. Our most innocent Dove found no peace for her Heart nor any footrest for her affections (Gen. 8:9) while thus with incessant sighing She took her flight through all the range of creation and beyond. Many times She sought to approach the Lord in tears and loving sighs; She turned to the Angels of her guard and addressed all the creatures as if they were capable of reason; then She would ascend to that highest habitation by her penetrating intellect and her most ardent affections, where the highest Good had met Her and where She reciprocally with Him had enjoyed ineffable delights. But the most high Lord, her beloved Spouse, who allowed Her to possess and yet not enjoy Him as before, by this possession of Him only inflamed more and more her most pure Heart, increasing her merits and continually showering upon Her new and hidden gifts so She could possess and love Him more, and in possessing and loving Him more She could seek Him with new inventions and yearnings of her inflamed love. *I sought Him* (said the heavenly Princess) *and found Him not* (Cant. 3:1); anew *I will arise and will go about the streets and the broad ways of the City of God*, renewing my solicitude (Ib. 2). But woe is me that my hands distilled myrrh (Ib. 5:5), my diligence is of no avail, and any exertions serve only to increase my sorrow! *I sought Him whom my heart loveth; I sought Him, and found Him not* (Ib. 3:2). My Beloved absents Himself; *I called, and He did not answer me* (Ib. 5:6). I turned my eyes to seek Him, but the guards and sentinels of the City (Ib. 7) and all creatures have vexed me and been offended at my sight. Daughters of Jerusalem, holy and just souls, I beseech thee, I supplicate thee, if thou meetest my Beloved, tell Him that I languish and am dying of his love (Ib. 8).

682. In these sweet and loving lamentations our Queen continued for several days like the humble spikenard giving forth most fragrant odors of sweetness (Ib. 1:2) in her apprehensions upon being apparently spurned by the Lord, who had secreted Himself in the hidden recesses of her most faithful Heart. Divine Providence, for the greater glory of the Lord and for the superabundant merits of his Spouse, protracted this conflict in such a manner that it continued for some time, though not very long. In the meanwhile our heavenly Lady suffered more spiritual torments and anxieties than all the saints together, for She gradually began to be alarmed by the fear of having lost God and fallen into disgrace through her own fault; and no one can estimate or know, except the Lord himself, what and how great was the grief of that burning Heart which had known how to love so much. To weigh this grief belongs to God alone, and so She could feel it in its fullest extent She was left by God to the overwhelming anxiety and fear of having lost Him.

INSTRUCTION GIVEN TO ME BY MY LADY AND QUEEN.

683. My daughter, all goods are estimated according to the appreciation which creatures have for them; they value them insofar as they know them to be good. But since there is only one true Good, and all others feigned and apparent, only this highest Good must of necessity* be known and appreciated; therefore thou shalt be able to give Him due esteem and love when thou dost know, enjoy and appreciate Him above all created things. By this appreciation and love is determined the sorrow of losing Him; thus thou canst understand something of the effects I felt

* cf. Lk. 10:42 [Ed.]

when the eternal Good absented Himself from me, leaving me fearful that perhaps I had lost Him through my own fault. And without doubt the pain of these fears and the force of love would many times have deprived me of life if the Lord himself had not preserved it.

684. Now consider what ought to be the sorrow of truly losing God by sin, if in a soul who does not experience the evil effects of sin the absence of our true Good can cause such suffering, even while knowing it has not lost Him but still possesses Him, though hidden and disguised to its own consciousness. This wisdom does not come to the mind of carnal men, who with a most irrational blindness esteem the apparent and fictitious good, and torment themselves and are disconsolate whenever it fails them; yet of the highest and truest Good they have no concept or estimation, since they never taste or recognize Him. And though this formidable ignorance contracted by the first sin was banished by my most holy Son, meriting for men faith and charity so they could know and enjoy in another manner the Good which they had never experienced, yet O sorrow!, that charity is forfeited and set aside for any kind of pleasure, while faith remains idle and dead without advantage. Thus the sons of darkness live as if they had only a pretended or doubtful connection with eternity.

685. Fear, soul, this danger never sufficiently pondered; rouse thyself, and live always watchful and prepared against the enemies who never sleep. Let thy meditation day and night be how thou canst work to avoid losing the highest Good whom thou lovest, for it is not appropriate for thee to sleep or doze off in the midst of invisible enemies. If perhaps thy Beloved is hidden from thee, patiently hope in Him and seek Him with sleepless solicitude, since thou knowest not his secret judgments. For the time of his absence and temptation provide thyself with the oil of charity (Mt. 25:12) and sincere intention in order that it not fail thee, and thou be reprobated with the foolish and negligent virgins.