

CHAPTER XVI

Continuing the Childhood of Most Holy Mary in the Temple; the Lord Prepares Her for Labors, and Her Father St. Joachim Dies.

657. We left our sovereign Princess, most holy Mary, passing the years of her childhood in the temple, while we made a diversion to speak of the virtues, gifts and divine revelations which She, a child in years but an adult in supreme wisdom, received from the hand of the Most High and which She put to practical use in her life. The most holy Child grew in age and grace before God and men, but always in such a proportion that her devotion exceeded the powers of nature, and grace was measured not by her age but by the beneficent designs and high purposes of the Divinity, whose impetuous currents sought their gathering and resting place in this City of God. The Most High continued his gifts and favors, renewing every hour the marvels of his powerful arm as if all its activity was reserved solely for most holy Mary. And so well did Her Majesty correspond in her tender age to this divine influx that She filled the Heart of the Lord himself with a perfect and appropriate complacency and all the angels of heaven with admiration. The celestial spirits were witnesses of something like a wonderful strife and competition between the Most High and the child Princess: The divine power in enriching Her, daily drawing from his treasures new and old blessings reserved solely for most pure Mary, and She, as the blessed earth, not only causing the seed of the divine word to sprout and the gifts and favors of God to yield fruit a hundredfold, as was the case with the saints, but exciting the admiration of all the heavens that She, a tender Child, exceeded in love and gratitude, in praise and all the virtues, the highest and most ardent Seraphim, without losing time, place, occasion, or any service in which She did not practice the highest possible perfection then possible to Her.

658. In the tender years of her childhood her capacity in reading the Scriptures was already evident, ordinarily spending much time in reading them. Since She was full of wisdom She conferred in her Heart what She knew from the divine revelations made to her own self with what is revealed to all men in the Holy Scriptures, and therefore in her reading and private meditation She sent up continual and fervent prayers and petitions for the Redemption of the human race and the Incarnation of the divine Word. She read more ordinarily from the prophets Isaias and Jeremias and from the Psalms, because the mysteries of the Messiah and the law of grace are more plainly expressed and repeated in these writings. In addition to what She herself understood and comprehended, She extended her knowledge by asking deep and wonderful questions and proposing difficulties to the Angels, and many times She spoke of the mystery of the humanity of the incarnate Word with incomparable tenderness, lovingly wondering that He was to become an infant, be born of a Virgin Mother, come to manhood as other men, and suffer and die for all the children of Adam.

659. In these conferences and questionings the holy Angels and Seraphim gave their answers, illuminating Her, confirming and inflaming her virginal Heart with new ardors of divine love. Yet they always concealed her own most exalted dignity from Her, though She many times offered Herself in most profound humility as a slave to the Lord and to the happy Mother whom He was to select for his birth into the world. At other times, interrogating the holy Angels, She spoke full of admiration: "My princes and lords, is it possible that the Creator himself is to be born of a creature and shall have Her as his Mother? That the Omnipotent and the Infinite, He who made the heavens and is not encompassed by them, shall enclose Himself in the womb of a Woman, and shall clothe Himself with a limited human nature? That He who vested in beauty

the elements, the heavens, and the angels themselves is to become subject to suffering? That there shall be a Woman of our own human nature who shall be so fortunate as to be able to call Him Son, He who created Her out of nothing, and that She shall hear Herself called Mother by Him, He who is uncreated and who created the whole universe? O unheard-of miracle! If the Author himself had not manifested it, how could earthly frailty conceive something so magnificent? O wonder of all his wonders! O happy and blessed the eyes that shall see it and the times that shall merit it!” To these affections and loving exclamations the holy Angels responded, declaring the divine sacraments without revealing what involved and pertained to Her.

660. Each of these high and ardent affections of humility in the child Mary was as one of those locks of the Spouse, or darts of love, with which She so wounded the Heart of God* that had it not been appropriate to wait until She had arrived at the competent and opportune age for conceiving and bringing forth the incarnate Word, his delight (according to our way of thinking) could not contain itself, and the Word would have assumed humanity at once in her womb. Yet He did not do this (though from her childhood She was already capable of this mystery as far as her grace and merits were concerned) in order to better disguise and conceal the sacrament of the Incarnation, and in order to protect and safeguard the honor of his most holy Mother, corresponding her virginal parturition to the natural age of other women. During this delay the Lord entertained Himself with the affections and pleasing canticles to which (according to our understanding) He attentively listened as coming from his Daughter and Spouse, who later was to be the worthy Mother of the incarnate Word. These canticles and psalms of our Queen and Lady were so numerous and so exalted that (according to the light given me) if they were written down the holy Church would possess many more than all the Prophets and Saints have left behind, for She expressed and comprehended all they have written, and over and above understood and expressed much more than they could ever attain. But the Most High has provided that the Church Militant would possess abundantly sufficient matter of that kind in the writings of the Apostles and Prophets, while his revelations to his most holy Mother are preserved and written in his divine mind, afterwards to be made known to the Church Triumphant insofar as shall be proper for the accidental glory of the Blessed.

661. In addition to this the divine condescension, in order to magnify her most prudent humility and leave for mortals this rare example of such excellent virtues, concurred with the most holy will of Mary our Lady, who always desired to hide the sacrament of the King (Tob. 12:7); and whenever it became necessary to partly reveal it for the service of His Majesty and the welfare of the Church, most holy Mary proceeded with such heavenly prudence that though She was the Teacher She never ceased to be the most humble Disciple. In her childhood She consulted the Angels and followed their counsels; after the incarnate Word was born She looked upon her Onlybegotten as her Teacher and example in all her actions; and at the close of his mysterious life and after his Ascension into heaven the great Queen of the universe obeyed the Apostles, as we shall relate. This is one of the reasons why in the Apocalypse St. John the Evangelist disguised the mysteries of this Lady beneath such enigmatic words that they can be interpreted and applied just as well to the Church Militant as to the Church Triumphant.

662. The Most High resolved that the plenitude of the graces and virtues of the princess Mary would as it were anticipate the time set for reaching the apex of her merits, and as far as possible extend to the most difficult and magnanimous undertakings even in her most tender years. In one

* cf. Cant. 4:9 [Ed.]

of the visions in which His Majesty manifested Himself to Her He said: “My Spouse and my Dove, I love Thee with an infinite love, and I desire from Thee what is most pleasing in my eyes and the entire fulfillment of all my desires. Thou art not unaware, my Daughter, of the hidden treasure which is contained in labors and hardships, abhorred by the blind ignorance of mortals. Thou also knowest that my Onlybegotten, when He vests Himself in human nature, shall teach the way of the cross by example and by doctrine, leaving it for an inheritance to my chosen ones since He shall choose it for Himself and establish upon it the law of grace, founding its firmness and excellence upon humility and patience in bearing the cross and hardships, since this is demanded by the nature of man itself, and much more after it remains depraved and inclined to evil due to sin. It is also conformable to my equity and providence for mortals to attain and earn the crown of glory by means of labors and the cross, since my onlybegotten Son made man is to merit it by the same means. For this reason Thou shalt understand, my Spouse, that having chosen Thee by my right hand for my delights, and having enriched Thee with my gifts, it would not be just for my grace to be idle in thy Heart, nor for thy love to lack its fruit, nor for Thee to lack the inheritance of my elect. Hence I desire Thee to dispose Thyself for tribulations and hardships for love of Me.”

663. To this proposition of the Most High the invincible Princess Mary answered with a Heart more constant than all the saints and martyrs have had in the world, saying: “My Lord God and most high King, all my operations and faculties, and my being itself which I have received from thy infinite goodness, I have dedicated to thy divine complaisance, so in all things it may be fulfilled according to the desire of thy infinite wisdom and goodness. And if Thou dost give me permission to choose anything, I desire only to suffer unto death for love of Thee; and I beseech Thee, my Good, make of this thy slave a sacrifice and holocaust of patience acceptable in thine eyes. I acknowledge, O powerful and most generous Lord and God, my debt, and that no creature owes Thee such a great return, nor are all of them together so indebted to Thee as I alone, who am most insufficient for discharging what I desire to render to thy magnificence. Yet if suffering for Thee is accepted as some sort of return, let all the tribulations and sorrows of death come upon me; I ask only for thy divine protection, and prostrate before the royal throne of thy infinite majesty I beseech Thee not to forsake me. Remember, my Lord, the faithful promises Thou hast made to thy faithful through our ancient fathers and Prophets to favor the just, be with those in distress, console the afflicted, and be a shield and defense to them in the conflict of tribulation. True are thy words, infallible and certain are thy promises; the heavens and the earth shall sooner fall to pieces than thy words ever fail.* The malice of the creature cannot extinguish thy charity toward those who hope in thy mercy. Fulfill in me thy holy and perfect will.”

664. The Most High accepted this morning offering of the tender Spouse and most holy child Mary, and with a most benign countenance He said to Her: “Beautiful art thou in thy thoughts, Daughter of the Prince, my Dove and my Beloved. I accept thy desires as pleasing in my eyes, and I desire Thee to understand the time for the beginning of their fulfillment has arrived. By my divine disposition thy father Joachim must pass from mortal life to the eternal and immortal life. His death shall happen very shortly, and he shall pass in peace and shall be placed among the saints in limbo to await the Redemption of the entire human race.” This announcement did not disturb or alter the royal bosom of Mary, the Princess of heaven; but since the love of children for their parents is a just debt of nature, and as in this most holy Child this love had attained its highest perfection, the natural sorrow for the loss of her father Joachim

* cf. Mk. 13:31 [Ed.]

could not be lacking, for She loved him with a holy love. The tender and sweet child Mary felt this sorrowful movement was compatible with the serenity of her magnanimous Heart, and working in all things with grandeur, giving nature and grace each their due, She offered an ardent prayer for her father St. Joachim. She besought the Lord to give him grace to depend upon Him as his powerful and true God in his transit through a blessed death, to defend him against the demon especially in that hour, and to preserve and constitute him among the number of the elect, since during his life he had confessed and magnified his admirable and holy Name. And in order to oblige His Majesty the more, the most faithful Daughter offered to suffer all the Lord might ordain.

665. The Lord accepted this petition and consoled the heavenly Child by assuring Her He would assist her father as a most merciful and kind Rewarder of those who love and serve Him, and would place him among the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. At the same time He prepared Her anew for the acceptance and endurance of troubles. Eight days before the death of the holy patriarch Joachim most holy Mary received another notice from the Lord, advising Her of the day and hour in which he was to die. His death took place only six months after her entrance into the temple. Having received this notice from the Lord She requested the twelve Angels mentioned by St. John in the Apocalypse (201, 272, 370) to assist her father Joachim and comfort and console him in his sickness, which they did. In the last hours of his life She sent all the Angels of her guard, asking the Lord to make them visible to him for his greater consolation. God conceded this favor and confirmed all the desires of his chosen and only One, and the great patriarch, most happy Joachim, saw the thousand Angels who guarded his daughter Mary. In response to her prayer and desires the Almighty allowed his graces to overflow, commanding the Angels to address Joachim as follows:

666. “Man of God, may the Most High and powerful Lord be thy eternal salvation, and may He send thee from his holy place the necessary and opportune help for thy soul. Mary, thy Daughter, has sent us in order to assist thee in this hour in which thou must pay to thy Creator the debt of natural death. She is thy most faithful and powerful Intercessor with the Most High, in whose name and peace do thou part from this world consoled and joyful because He has made thee the father of such a blessed Daughter. And though His incomprehensible Majesty, due to his hidden judgments, has not manifested until this hour the sacrament and dignity with which He shall invest thy Daughter, He desires thee to know it now so thou mayest magnify and praise Him, and join the natural pain and sorrow of death to the joy of thy spirit at such news: Mary, thy Daughter and our Queen, is chosen by the arm of the Omnipotent as the one in whose womb the divine Word shall vest Himself with human flesh and form. She is to be the happy Mother of the Messiah and the blessed among women, superior among all creatures, and inferior only to God himself. Thy most happy Daughter shall repair what the human race lost by the first sin, and She is the high mountain upon which is to be formed and established the new law of grace.* Since thou leavest to the world its Restoratrix and a Daughter through whom God shall prepare the opportune remedy, do thou part from it in the joy of thy soul, and may the Lord bless thee from Sion (Ps. 127:5) and establish thee among the fellowship of the saints in order to bring thee to the vision and enjoyment of the blissful Jerusalem.”

667. During these words of the holy Angels to Joachim, his spouse St. Anne stood at the head of his bed, and by divine disposition she heard and understood what was said. In the same moment the holy patriarch lost the use of speech, and treading into the path common to all flesh

* cf. Is. 2:2 [Ed.]

he began his agony in a marvelous struggle between his joy at this message and the pain of death. In this conflict of the interior powers of his soul he made many fervent acts of divine love, of faith, admiration, praise, gratitude and humility, and heroic acts of other virtues. Thus absorbed in the knowledge of such a divine mystery he arrived at the term of his natural life and died the precious death of the saints (Ps. 115:15). His holy soul was carried by the Angels to the limbo of the holy Fathers and the just, and for a new consolation and light in the prolonged night in which they lived the Most High ordained that the soul of the holy patriarch Joachim would be the new legate of His great Majesty to announce to that entire congregation of the just how the day of eternal light was already breaking since most holy Mary, the dawn, was born, the daughter of Joachim and Anne, and from Her would be born the sun of the Divinity, Christ the Repairer of the entire human race. This news was heard by the holy fathers and the just in limbo, and they received it with jubilation, singing new canticles of praise to the Most High.

668. This happy death of the patriarch St. Joachim happened (as related above [665]) about half a year after his most holy daughter Mary had entered the temple. Hence She was three and a half years old when She was left without an earthly father. The age of the patriarch was sixty-nine years, divided as follows: At the age of forty-six he accepted St. Anne as his spouse; in the twentieth year of his marriage they were blessed with most holy Mary; and her age of three and a half years at his death complete the sixty-nine and a half years, a few days more or less.

669. After the death of the holy Patriarch and father of our Queen the Angels of her guard at once returned to her presence and related to Her what had happened in the passing away of her father, and immediately the most prudent Child turned in solicitous prayers to the Lord, asking Him to console, govern and assist her mother St. Anne with fatherly kindness in her solitude after the death of her spouse. St. Anne also sent notice of the death of Joachim to the instructress of the heavenly Princess, asking her to console the Child in breaking this news to Her. The teacher acted accordingly and the most wise Child listened to her gratefully, concealing her own knowledge, and with the patience and modesty of a Queen and of one who was not unaware of the possibility of the event which her instructress related to Her as new. Acting in all things according to the highest perfection She went at once into the temple, renewing her sacrifice of praise, humility, patience, and other virtues, and progressing always with more accelerated and beautiful steps in the eyes of the Most High (Cant. 7:1). As a climax of these exercises She, as usual, requested the holy Angels to concur and assist in blessing God.

INSTRUCTION WHICH THE QUEEN OF HEAVEN GAVE ME.

670. My daughter, repeat many times in the secret of thy heart the appreciation which thou dost owe for labors, which the hidden providence of God dispenses for the justification of mortals. These are the judgments *justified in themselves, more desirable than precious stones and gold, and sweeter than honey and the honeycomb* (Ps. 18:10-11) to those who know how to hold them in proper esteem. I desire thee to remember, my beloved, that to suffer and be afflicted with or without one's fault is a benefit of which no one can be worthy without the great mercy of the Most High; moreover, to be given suffering for one's sins, though it is a mercy, has much to do with justice as well. Knowing this, behold now the great insanity of the children of Adam in desiring and seeking after gifts, benefits and favors agreeable to their senses, and in sleeplessly striving to avert from themselves that which is painful or includes any hardship or trouble. It would be to their greatest benefit to seek tribulations diligently even when unmerited, yet they

strive by all means to avoid them even when merited, and even though they cannot be happy and blessed without having undergone such sufferings.

671. When gold flees from the furnace, the iron from the file, the grain from the thresher* or grinding stone, or grapes from the winepress, they are all useless and will not attain the end for which they were created. Why then will mortals continue to deceive themselves by expecting, in spite of their sins, to become pure and worthy of enjoying God without the furnace or the file of sorrows? If when they were innocent they were neither apt nor worthy of attaining the crown and reward of the infinite and eternal Good, how can they attain it when they are in darkness and in disgrace before the Almighty? In addition to this the sons of perdition are exerting all their powers to remain unworthy and hostile to God, and in evading crosses and afflictions, which are the paths left open for returning to God, the light of the intellect, the means of recognizing the deceptiveness of visible things, the nourishment of the just, the only means of grace, the price of glory, and above all the legitimate inheritance selected by my Son and Lord for Himself and for all his elect, since He was born and continually lived in afflictions and died upon the cross.

672. By such standards, my daughter, must thou measure the value of suffering which the worldly will not understand. Since they are unworthy of heavenly knowledge they despise it in proportion to their ignorance. Rejoice and congratulate thyself in thy sufferings, and whenever the Almighty deigns to send thee any hasten to meet it and welcome it as one of his blessings and pledges of his glorious love. Furnish thy heart with magnanimity and constancy, so when an occasion of suffering is given to thee thou mayest bear it with the same equanimity as the prosperous and agreeable things. Be not filled with sadness in executing that which thou hast promised in gladness, for the Lord loves those who are equally ready to give as to receive (II Cor. 9:7). Hence sacrifice thy heart and all thy faculties as a holocaust of patience, and sing in new canticles of joy and praise the justifications of the Most High whenever in the place of thy journey He signalizes and distinguishes thee as his own with the signs of his friendship, which are none other than the tribulations and trials of suffering.

673. Take notice, my dearest, that my most holy Son and I are trying to find among those who have arrived at the way of the cross some soul whom we can instruct systematically in this divine science, and whom we can withdraw from the worldly and diabolical wisdom in which the sons of Adam with blind stubbornness are rejecting the salutary discipline of sufferings. If thou dost desire to be our disciple enter into this school in which alone is taught the doctrine of the cross, and find in it rest and true delights. With this wisdom the earthly love of sensible pleasures and riches is not compatible, nor the vain ostentation and pomp which fascinate the bleary-eyed worldlings who are so covetous of passing honors and so full of ignorant admiration for costly grandeur. Thou, my daughter, choose for thyself the better part of being among the lowly and forgotten ones of this world. I was Mother of the incarnate God himself, and on that account Mistress of all creation conjointly with my Son, yet I was little known, and my Son very much despised by men. If this doctrine was not most valuable and secure we would not have taught it by word and example. This is the light which shines in the darkness (Jn. 1:7), loved by the elect and abhorred by the reprobate.

* cf. Lk. 3:17 [Ed.]