

CHAPTER XX

The Most High Manifests Himself to His Beloved Mary, Our Princess, by a Singular Favor.

725. Already our heavenly Princess felt the day of the clear vision of the Divinity was approaching, and like the harbingers of early dawn the rays of the divine light were breaking upon her soul. Her Heart began to be inflamed by the nearness of the invisible fire which illumines but does not consume, and made attentive by this new clearness She questioned her Angels and said to them: "My friends and lords, my most faithful and vigilant sentinels, tell me: What hour is it of my night? And when shall arrive the dawn of my clear day in which my eyes shall see the Sun of justice which illumines them and gives life to my affections and my soul?" The holy Princes answered Her and said: "Spouse of the Most High, thy desired truth and light is near; it shall not tarry long, for already it approaches." At these words the veil which hid the view of these spiritual substances was somewhat lifted, and the holy Angels manifested themselves, and She saw them as She was accustomed to before, in their own essence, without hindrance or dependence on the bodily senses.

726. With this encouragement and with the vision of the heavenly spirits the anxieties of most holy Mary concerning the sight of her Beloved were somewhat allayed; yet this kind of love seeks after the most noble Object, and without Him, though enjoying the presence of the angels and saints, the heart, wounded by the arrows of the Omnipotent, will not come to rest. Nevertheless our heavenly Princess, rejoiced by this alleviation, spoke to her Angels and said to them: "Sovereign Princes and radiance of that inaccessible light in which my Beloved dwells, why have I for so long a time been unworthy of thy sight? In what have I been displeasing to thee and failed to satisfy thee? Tell me, my lords and teachers, how I have been negligent so I may not again be forsaken by thee through my fault." They answered: "Lady and Spouse of the Almighty, we obey the voice of our Creator, and by his holy will we are all governed, and as spirits belonging to Him He sends us and ordains what is for his service. He commanded us to conceal ourselves from thy sight when He hid Himself; however, though hidden we assisted Thee carefully as thy helper and defender, thus fulfilling his command by remaining in thy company though hidden from sight."

727. "Then now tell me (replied most holy Mary) where my Master, my Good, my Maker is. Tell me whether my eyes shall see Him soon, or whether perhaps I have displeased Him, so this most vile creature may bitterly bewail the cause of her punishment. Ministers and ambassadors of the supreme King, be moved by my loving affliction, and give me tokens of my Beloved." They answered: "Soon, O Lady, Thou shalt see Him whom thy soul desires. In thy sweet sorrow maintain confidence; our God shall not deny those who seek Him so truly. Great, O Lady, is his loving goodness with those who cling to Him, and He shall not be miserly in satisfying thy clamors." The holy Angels openly called Her Lady since they were sure of her most prudent humility and could conceal the full meaning of this title under the pretense of her position as Spouse of the Most High, for She knew they had been eyewitnesses of the espousal which His Majesty had celebrated with their Queen. And since his wisdom had disposed that the Angels hide from Her only the title and dignity of Mother of the incarnate Word until its time, they could give Her great reverence in all the rest; thus they treated Her with many demonstrations of reverence, though they respected Her much more for what was hidden than for what was manifest.

728. During these conferences and loving colloquies the heavenly Princess awaited the approach of her Spouse and her highest delight, while the Seraphim who attended Her began to prepare Her by new enlightenment of her faculties, a sure pledge of the beginning of the good for which She hoped. Yet as these favors inflamed more the fire of her love without allowing Her as yet to reach the desired end, the activity of her loving anguish continued to grow, and in such movements She spoke to the Seraphim, saying: "Supreme spirits, thou who art closest to my Good, ye most splendid mirrors from whence reflected I was accustomed to see his likeness with joy of my soul, tell me: Where is the light which illumines thee and fills thee with beauty? Tell me, why does my Beloved tarry so long? Tell me, what impedes Him so my eyes do not see Him? If it is through my fault I shall amend my errors; if I do not merit the fulfillment of my desires I shall conform myself to his pleasure; and if He seeks his pleasure in my sorrow I shall suffer in the joy of my heart. Yet tell me, how can I live without my own life? How shall I govern myself without my light?"

729. To these sweet complaints the holy Seraphim answered: "Lady, thy Beloved does not tarry when for thy good and thy love He absents and withholds Himself. In order to console those He most loves He afflicts them; in order to give greater joy He distresses them; in order to be sought He withdraws from them. He desires Thee to sow in tears (Ps. 125:5), and thus afterwards gather the sweet fruits of sorrow. If the well Beloved did not hide Himself He would not be sought after with the longings which result from his absence, nor would the soul renew its affections, nor attain such growth in the appreciation due to its Treasure."

730. They transmitted to Her that light of which I have spoken (623) in order to purify her faculties, not because there were any defects to be remedied, for She could not be guilty of any defects; on the contrary, all her actions and operations during the absence of the Lord had been meritorious and holy. Nevertheless it was necessary for Her to be endowed with new gifts in order to tranquilize her spirit and her faculties, which had been moved by affectionate labors and anxieties during the absence of the Lord, and also in order to withdraw Her from her present state and raise Her to a position where She could enjoy new and different favors, for in order for her faculties to again be proportioned to the high Object and the manner of enjoying Him they must necessarily be renewed and predisposed. All this the holy Seraphim proceeded to do with Her in the manner already described in Book Two, chapter XIV, after which the Lord himself provided the final adornment and quality to prepare Her with the final disposition immediately prior to the vision which He desired to manifest.

731. As far as I can explain, this successive elevation of the faculties of the heavenly Queen engendered those particular affections and sentiments of love and virtues which the Lord desired, and in the midst of these elevations His Majesty withdrew the veil. Then after his long concealment He manifested Himself to his only Spouse and beloved, most holy Mary, by an abstractive vision of the Divinity. Although this vision was given through abstractive images and was not intuitive, yet it was most clear and exalted in its kind. By it the Lord dried the continual tears of our Queen, rewarded her affection and her loving yearnings, satisfied all her desires, and overwhelmed Her with delight as She reclined on the arms of her Beloved (Cant. 8:5). Then was renewed the youth of this ardent and most fervent eagle (Ps. 102:5) in order to raise her flight to the impenetrable region of the Divinity, and by the effects which remained after this vision She ascended whither no other creature can ascend nor other intellect reach outside of God himself.

732. The joy which filled the most pure Lady on the occasion of this vision must be measured by the extreme sorrow through which She had passed, as well as the accumulation of merits which She had gained. I can only say that where and how much sorrow had abounded, so also

now overflowed her joy, and that her patience, humility, fortitude, constancy, affections, and amorous longings were in Mary the entire time of this absence the most remarkable and excellent that had ever existed until that time or ever after could be possible in any other creature. This unique Lady alone understood the beauty of this wisdom, and knew how to properly weigh the lack of the sight of God and feel his absence. She alone suffered and measured this great loss in humility and with fortitude in order to make it conducive to her sanctification by ineffable love, and afterwards to appreciate the blessings and joy of its recovery.

733. Being then elevated to this vision, and having prostrated Herself in the divine presence, most holy Mary said to His Majesty: “Lord and God most high, incomprehensible and highest Good of my soul, since Thou dost raise from the dust this poor and vile wormlet, receive, O Lord, in the humble gratitude of my soul thy own goodness and the glory which thy courtiers give thee; and if as a low and earthly creature my works have displeased Thee, reform now in me, my Master, what has dissatisfied Thee. O goodness and wisdom incomparable and infinite, purify my heart and renew it so it may be grateful, humble and penitent so Thou mayest not reject me. If I have not borne my insignificant troubles and the death of my parents as I ought, and in anything deviated from that which is pleasing to Thee, arrange, O most high God, my faculties and works as my powerful Lord, as my Father, and as the only Spouse of my soul.”

734. To this humble prayer the Most High responded: “My Spouse and my Dove, the sorrow at the death of thy parents and the feelings occasioned by the other troubles is the natural effect of the human condition and not a fault; and by the love with which Thou hast entirely conformed Thyself to the disposition of my divine will Thou hast merited anew my grace and complaisance. As Lord of all I dispense the true light and its effects by my wisdom, and form successively the day and the night; I cause serenity, and also give storms their time,* so my power and glory may be magnified, and by them the soul may navigate more securely with the ballast of self-knowledge, and by the violent waves of tribulation hasten more expeditiously and arrive at the secure harbor of my friendship and grace, and more laden with merits oblige Me to receive it with greater pleasure. This is, my Beloved, the admirable order of my wisdom, and for this reason I concealed Myself during this time from thy sight, for from Thee I desire the most holy and most perfect. Serve Me then, my beautiful One, who am thy Spouse and God of infinite mercies, for my Name is admirable in the diversity and variety of my great works.”

735. Our Princess issued from this vision altogether renovated and deified, full of new knowledge of the Divinity and the hidden sacraments of the King, confessing Him, adoring Him, and praising Him with incessant canticles in the flights of her pacified and most tranquil spirit; in the same degree were the increases of her humility and all the other virtues. Her continuous petition was always to inquire into what was most perfect and agreeable to the will of the Most High, and in all things to entirely execute and fulfill it. Thus passed a number of days until happened what is to be related in the following chapter.

INSTRUCTION OF OUR LADY, THE QUEEN OF HEAVEN.

736. My daughter, many times I shall repeat to thee the lesson containing the greatest wisdom for souls, which consists in attaining the knowledge of the cross by the love of labors, and putting this knowledge into practice by suffering them. If the condition of mortals was not so coarse they would covet sufferings merely for the sake of their God and Lord, who has

* cf. Eccles. 3:1-8 [Ed.]

proclaimed them to be according to his will and pleasure, since the faithful and loving servant should always place the preference of his master before his own convenience. But worldlings in their lethargy are moved neither by the duty of conforming to their Father and Lord, nor by his declaration that all their salvation consists in following Christ in his sufferings,* and that his sinful children must reap the fruit of the Redemption by imitation of their sinless Head.

737. Accept then, my dearest, this doctrine, and engrave it deeply into thy heart. Understand that as a daughter of the Most High, as a spouse of my Son, and as my disciple, even if from no other motive thou must acquire the precious pearl of suffering and thus become pleasing to thy Lord and Spouse. I exhort thee, my daughter, to select the sufferings of his Cross in preference to his favors and gifts, and embrace afflictions rather than desire to be visited with caresses, for in choosing favors and delights thou mayest be moved by self-love, but in accepting tribulations and sorrows thou canst be moved only by the love of Christ. And if preference is to be given to sufferings rather than to delights whenever it can be done without sin, what foolishness is it when men pursue so blindly the deceitful and vile delights of the senses, and when they abhor so much all that pertains to suffering for Christ and for the good of their soul?

738. Thy incessant prayer, my daughter, should be always to repeat: Here I am, Lord, what wilt Thou do with me? Prepared is my heart, I am ready and not disturbed; what dost Thou wish me to do for Thee? These sentiments should fill thy heart in their full and true import, repeating them more by sincere and ardent affection than by word of mouth. Let thy thoughts be exalted, thy intentions most upright, pure and noble, desiring to fulfill in all things the greater pleasure of the Lord, who with measure and weight dispenses labors, grace, and his favors. Always examine thyself and search thyself again by what thoughts, what actions, and in what occasions thou mayest either offend or more highly please thy Beloved, and thus learn what thou must strive to correct or what thou must aspire to within thyself. Every disorder, be it yet so small, and all that may be less pure and perfect, make sure to curtail and expunge immediately, even though it seems allowable or even of some profit. All that is not most pleasing to the Lord thou must consider as evil, or as useless for thyself, and no imperfection must appear small to thee if it is displeasing to God. With this anxious fear and holy solicitude thou shalt walk securely, and be certain, my dearest daughter, that it cannot enter into the mind of man what copious reward the most high Lord reserves for those souls who live in this kind of attention and solicitude.

* cf. Lk. 9:23 [Ed.]