

CHAPTER XIV

The Attention and Care which Mary Most Holy Bestowed upon the Infant Jesus, and Other Things She Experienced Regarding Him.

180. As soon as our Lady and Queen issued from the ecstasy in which She had conceived the eternal incarnate Word, She prostrated Herself upon the earth and adored Him in her womb, as I have already said in chapter XII (152). This adoration She continued all her life, commencing it at midnight every day and repeating these genuflexions three hundred times until the same hour of the following night, and more whenever She had the opportunity. In this She was even more diligent during the nine months of her divine pregnancy. In order to comply entirely with the new duties consequent upon the guarding of this Treasure of the eternal Father in the virginal bridal chamber, She directed all her attention toward frequent and fervent prayer. She was solicitous in sending up many and reiterated petitions to be able worthily to preserve the heavenly Treasure confided to Her. Hence She dedicated anew to the Lord her soul and all her faculties, practicing all virtues in a heroic and supreme degree, causing new astonishment in the angels. She also consecrated and offered up all the motions of her body to the worship and service of the infant Godman within Her. Whether She ate, slept, labored or rested She did it all for the nourishment and conservation of her most sweet Son, and in all these actions She was inflamed more and more with divine love.

181. On the day following the Incarnation the thousand Guardian Angels who attended upon most holy Mary appeared in corporeal form, and with profound humility adored Him in the womb of the Mother of their incarnate King. They also acknowledged Her anew as their Queen and Lady, and rendered Her due homage and reverence, saying: "Now, O Lady, Thou art the true Ark of the Testament, since Thou containest the Lawgiver himself (Dt. 10:5) and preservest the manna of heaven (Heb. 9:4), which is our true bread.* Receive, O Queen, our congratulations because of thy dignity and happiness, for which we also thank the Most High since He has justly chosen Thee for his Mother and his tabernacle. We offer anew to Thee our homage and service, and wish to obey Thee as vassals and servants of the supreme and omnipotent King, whose Mother Thou art." This offering and new veneration of the holy Angels excited in the Mother of Wisdom incomparable sentiments of humility, gratitude, and love of God, for in this most prudent Heart, where all things were weighed with the scales of the sanctuary according to their true value and weight, this reverence and acknowledgment of the angelic spirits proclaiming Her as their Queen was held in high esteem. Although it was a greater thing to see Herself the Mother of the King and Lord of all creation, yet all her blessings and dignities were made more evident by these demonstrations and courtesies of the holy Angels.

182. The Angels rendered this homage as executors and ministers of the will of the Most High (Heb. 1:14). When their Queen and our Lady was alone all of them attended upon Her in corporeal form, and they assisted Her in her outward actions and occupations; and when She was engaged in manual labor, they administered to Her what was needed. Whenever She happened to eat alone in the absence of St. Joseph they waited upon Her at her poor table and her humble meals. Everywhere they followed Her and formed an escort and helped Her in the services rendered to St. Joseph. Amid all these favors and helps the heavenly Lady did not forget to ask

* cf. Ps. 77:25; Jn. 6:30-35, 48-59 [Ed.]

permission from the Master of masters for all of her operations and undertakings and implore his direction and assistance. So exact and so well governed were all her exercises according to the plenitude of perfection that the Lord alone could comprehend and properly weigh them.

183. Besides the ordinary guidance during the time in which She carried in her most holy womb the incarnate Word, She felt his divine presence in diverse ways, all of them admirable and most sweet. Sometimes He showed Himself to Her by abstractive vision, as mentioned above. At other times She saw and beheld Him as He was now present in the virginal temple, united hypostatically with the human nature. At other times the most holy humanity was manifested to Her as if in a crystalline monstrance composed of her own maternal womb and purest body; this kind of vision gave special consolation and delight to the great Queen. At other times She perceived how the glory of his most holy soul overflowed into the body of the divine Child, communicating to his body some of the effects of the blessedness and glory of his soul, and how the clarity and light of the natural body of her Son passed over in a wonderfully sweet, ineffable and divine manner into Herself as Mother. This favor transformed Her entirely into another existence, inflaming her Heart and causing in Her such effects as no created capacity can explain. Let the intellect of the highest Seraphim extend and dilate as much as it may, it would nevertheless find itself overwhelmed by this glory (Prov. 25:27), for the entire being of the heavenly Queen was an intellectual and animated heaven, and in Her was summarized the divine glory and greatness in a measure that even the vast confines of the heavens themselves could not encompass (III Kg. 8:27).

184. These and other prerogatives alternated and succeeded each other in accordance with the exercises of the divine Mother with such variety as suited the different kinds of work which She performed. All her doings, whether spiritual, manual, or otherwise of the body, served her God or benefited her neighbor, being undertaken and accomplished by this prudent Maiden to produce a harmony admirable and most sweet before the Lord and wonderful to the angelic spirits. And when by the disposition of the Most High the Lady of the world returned to a more natural state, She suffered mortal agony caused by the force and violence of her love, for to Her could in truth be applied what Solomon says in the name of the Spouse: *Stay me up with flowers, because I languish with love* (Cant. 2:5). And thus it would happen that by the piercing wounds of these sweet arrows of love She was brought near to the ending of her life; but in this necessity the powerful arm of the Most High was accustomed to strengthen Her in a supernatural manner.

185. Sometimes in order to give Her sensible relief innumerable birds would come to visit Her by the command of the Lord. As if they were endowed with intellect they would salute Her by their lively movements, and dividing into harmonious choirs would furnish Her with sweetest music, and they would wait for her blessing before again dispersing. This happened in a special manner soon after She had conceived the divine Word, as if they wished to congratulate Her on her dignity in imitation of the Angels. The Mistress of all creatures on that day spoke to the different kinds of birds and commanded them to remain and praise with Her the Creator in thanksgiving for the creation, existence and beauty given to them, and to sing his praises for their conservation. Immediately they obeyed Her as their Lady and anew they began to form choirs, singing in sweetest harmony and bowing low to the ground to worship their Creator and honor the Mother who bore Him in her womb. They were accustomed to bring flowers to Her in their beaks and place them into her hands, waiting until She would command them to sing or to be silent according to her desires. It also happened that in bad weather some birds would come and seek the protection of the heavenly Lady, and She took them in and nourished them, in her admirable innocence glorifying the Creator of all things.

186. Our tepid ignorance must not be surprised at these wonders, for though the incidents might be called small the purposes of the Most High are great and venerable in all his works; and also the works of our most prudent Queen were great, no matter what kind they were. And who is so presumptuous as to ignore the importance of knowing how much of the essence of God and his perfections are manifest in the existence of all the creatures? How important it is to seek Him and find Him, to bless Him and magnify Him in all his creatures as admirable, powerful, generous and holy? Why would it not be our duty to imitate Mary most holy, who overlooked no time, place or occasion to attain this object? And how also shall our ungrateful forgetfulness not be confounded and our hardness of heart not be softened? How can our listless heart fail to be aroused when we see ourselves reprehended and urged for very shame to gratitude by the irrational creatures? Merely for the slight participation of the Divinity that consists in bare existence they proclaim his praises without intermission, whereas we men, who are made to the image and likeness of God, furnished with the powers of knowing Him and enjoying Him eternally, forget Him so far as not even to know Him, and instead of serving Him offend Him! With no right can these men be preferred to the brute animals, since they have become worse than the brutes (Ps. 48:13, 21).

INSTRUCTION OF OUR LADY, THE MOST HOLY QUEEN.

187. My daughter, thou hast received my instruction until now in order to desire and strive after the heavenly science which I desire thee so earnestly to acquire, and which shall teach thee to understand profoundly what decorous reverence is due to God. I remind thee once more that among mortals, because of their ignorance, this science is very troublesome and little coveted, resulting in much damage to them; for thence it arises that in conversing with the Most High or rendering Him service or worship they fail to form a worthy concept of his infinite greatness and free themselves from the darksome images of their earthly occupations which make them torpid and carnal, unworthy and unfit for the magnificent communication with the sovereign Divinity. And upon this coarseness follows another disorder, namely whenever they converse with their neighbor they do it without order, measure or discretion, become entangled in their outward actions, and losing the memory and presence of their Creator in the excitement of their passions are completely entangled in what is earthly.

188. Hence I desire thee, my dearest, to flee from this danger and learn the science of the immutable being and infinite attributes of God. Thou must study Him and unite thyself to Him in such a way that no created being shall come between thy soul and the true and highest Good. At all times and in all places, occupations and operations thou must keep Him in sight, without releasing Him from the intimate embrace of thy heart (Cant. 3:4). Therefore I command thee to treat Him with a magnanimous heart, with decorum and reverence, and with deeply felt fear of the soul. And whatever pertains to his divine worship I desire thee to handle with all attention and care. Above all, in order to enter into his presence by prayer and petitions free thyself from all sensible and earthly images. And since human frailty cannot always remain constant in the force of love, nor always experience the sweet violence of its movements because of its earthly nature, thou must seek other assistance such as shall help thee toward the same end of finding thy God. Such help, for instance, is provided by his praise in the beauty of the heavens and the stars, in the variety of the plants, in the pleasant vista of the fields, in the forces of the elements, and especially in the exalted nature of the angels and the glory of his saints.

189. But bear continually in mind especially this particular caution, not to seek any earthly alleviation in any event or in any labor which thou art to undergo, nor to indulge in any diversion coming from human creatures, and especially not in those coming from men, for due to thy naturally weak and yielding character, so much adverse to giving pain, thou dost place thyself in danger of exceeding and overstepping the limit of what is allowed or just, following thy sensible likings more than is proper for the religious spouses of my most holy Son. All human creatures run the risk of this negligence, for if full rein is given to frail human nature it will not give heed to reason nor to the true light of the spirit, but forgetting them entirely it will blindly follow the impulse of its passions and pleasures. Against this general danger is provided the enclosure and retirement of the souls consecrated to my Son and Lord, in order to cut off the root of those unhappy and disgraceful occasions for those religious who would willingly seek them and entangle themselves in them. Thy recreations, my dearest, and those of thy sister religious must be free from such danger and deadly poison. Seek always those which thou shalt find in the secret of thy breast and in the chamber of thy Beloved, who is faithful in consoling the sorrowful and assisting the afflicted (Ps. 90:15).