

## CHAPTER XVIII

### *Mary Most Holy Arranges Her Exercises in the House of Zacharias, and Some Happenings with St. Elizabeth.*

231. When the Precursor John had been sanctified and his mother St. Elizabeth had been endowed with such great gifts and blessings (for all this was the principal intention of the Visitation of most holy Mary), the great Queen proceeded to arrange her daily life in the house of Zacharias, for her occupations could not be uniformly the same as those She was accustomed to in her own house. In order to guide her desire by the direction of the divine Spirit, She retired and placed Herself in the presence of the Most High, asking Him as usual to guide Her and direct Her in what She was to do during her stay in the house of his servants Elizabeth and Zacharias, so She could in all things be pleasing to Him and fulfill entirely his pleasure. The Lord heard her petition and answered Her, saying: "My Spouse and my Dove, I shall govern all thy actions, and direct thy footsteps for my greater service and pleasure, and I shall designate the day on which I desire thee to return to thy home. In the meantime remain in the house of my servant Elizabeth and converse with her. As for the rest, continue thy exercises and petitions, especially for the salvation of men, and that I do not exercise against them my justice for the incessant offenses against my multiplied beneficence. And in this petition offer to Me the Lamb without spot (I Peter 1:19) whom Thou bearest in thy womb, who takest away the sins of the world (Jn. 1:29). Let these now be thy occupations."

232. In conformity with this instruction and new mandate of the Most High the Princess of heaven ordered all her occupations in the house of her cousin Elizabeth. She rose up at midnight in accordance with her former custom, spending the hours in the continued contemplation of the divine mysteries, and giving to waking and sleeping that which most perfectly and proportionately corresponded with the natural state of her body. In labor and repose She continued to receive new favors, illuminations, elevations, and gifts of the Lord. During these three months She had many visions of the Divinity, mostly abstractive in kind. More frequent still were the visions of the most holy humanity of the Word in the hypostatic union, for her virginal womb in which She bore Him served Her as her continual altar and sanctuary. She beheld the daily growth of that sacred body. By this experience and by the sacraments which every day were made manifest to Her in the boundless fields of the divine power and essence the spirit of this exalted Lady expanded to vast proportions. Many times by the conflagration of her love and her ardent affections She arrived at bodily exhaustion and would have died if She had not been comforted by the power of the Lord. To these occupations which were concealed from all She added those which the service and consolation of her cousin Elizabeth demanded, though She did not apply one moment more to them than charity required. These fulfilled, She turned immediately to her solitude and recollection, where She could pour forth the more freely her spirit before the Lord.

233. She was not less solicitous in occupying Herself interiorly while She was engaged for many hours in manual occupations, and in all this the Precursor was so fortunate that the great Queen with her own hands sewed and prepared the swaddling clothes and blankets in which he was to be wrapped and raised, for his mother St. Elizabeth in her maternal solicitude and attention had secured for St. John this good fortune, humbly asking this favor of the heavenly Lady, who with incredible love and obedience complied with her request in order to exercise Herself in this virtue, rendering this obedience to the Lord as the least of his creatures, since in

humility and obedience most holy Mary always vanquished all men. Though St. Elizabeth sought to anticipate Her in much that belonged to her service, yet in her rare prudence and wisdom the Blessed Mother knew how to forestall her cousin, always gaining the triumph of humility.

234. In this regard a great and sweet competition arose between the two cousins which was very pleasing to the Most High and wonderful in the sight of the Angels, for St. Elizabeth was very solicitous and attentive in serving our Lady and great Queen and in commanding also the same service to be rendered to Her by all those of her family. But She who was the Teacher of virtues, most holy Mary, being still more attentive and eager to serve, met and diverted the solicitude of her cousin, saying: “My friend and cousin, I find my consolation in being commanded and in obeying during all my life. It is not good for thy love to deprive me of the consolation I receive in this, being the younger; for the same reason I beseech thee to allow me to serve not only thee as to my mother, but all in thy house. Treat me as thy servant while I remain in thy company.” St. Elizabeth answered: “My Lady and beloved, it belongs to me to obey Thee, and to Thee to command and govern me in all things, and this I ask of thee with greater justice. For if Thou, Lady, dost desire to exercise humility, I on my part owe worship and reverence to my God and Lord whom Thou bearest in thy virginal womb, and I know thy dignity is worthy of all honor and reverence.” The most prudent Virgin rejoined: “My Son and my Lord did not choose me for his Mother so in this life I would be given such veneration as a Lady; for his kingdom is not of this world (Jn. 18:36), nor did He come into it in order to be served, but to serve (Mt. 20:28), and to suffer, and to teach mortals how to obey and humble themselves (Mt. 11:29), condemning pride and ostentation. Thus since His most high Majesty teaches me this, and calls Himself the *reproach of men* (Ps. 21:7), how can I, who am his slave and who does not merit the company of creatures, consent that thou, who art formed according to his image and likeness (Gen. 1:27), serve me?”

235. St. Elizabeth still insisted and said: “My Lady and Protectress, this shall be for those who do not know the sacrament which is enclosed in Thee; yet I, who without merit have been informed of this by the Lord, will be very reprehensible in his presence if I do not give Him in Thee the veneration which is due to Him as God and to Thee as his Mother, for it is just that I serve both of Thee as a slave serves her masters.” To this most holy Mary responded: “My friend and sister, this reverence which thou dost owe and desire to give is due to the Lord whom I bear in my womb, for He is the true and highest Good and our Savior; yet toward myself, who am a mere creature and among them only a poor wormlet, look upon me as I am in myself, although thou must adore the Creator who chose my poor self as his dwelling. By the divine light of truth itself thou canst give to God what is due to Him, and to me that which pertains to me, which is to serve and to be below all. This I beseech thee for my consolation, and by the Lord himself whom I bear in my womb.”

236. In such blessed and happy contentions most holy Mary and her cousin Elizabeth passed some of their time. Yet the divine prudence of our Queen caused in Her such an alertness and ingenuity in matters concerning humility and obedience that She never failed to find ways and means of obeying and being commanded. However, during all the time in which She stayed with St. Elizabeth all this was done in such a way that both respectively treated with magnificence the sacrament of the Lord hidden in their hearts, deposited in most holy Mary as the Mother and Lady of virtues and grace, and in her cousin Elizabeth as a most prudent matron and full of the divine light of the Holy Ghost. By this light she wisely directed her behavior in regard to the Mother of God, yielding to her desires and obeying Her in whatever she could, reverencing both her dignity and their Creator within Her. She proposed in her heart that if she were obliged to

give any command to the Mother of God she would do it only in order to obey and satisfy her desires; and whenever she did it, she asked permission and pardon of the Lord, at the same time never ordering anything by direct command, but always by request; and she would use greater earnestness only in such things as would give some relief to the Queen, for example that She take some sleep or nourishment. She also asked Her to make a few articles for her with her own hands, and She complied; yet St. Elizabeth never made use of them, but preserved them with veneration.

237. In this way most holy Mary put into practice the doctrine of the eternal Word, who humbled Himself so far that being the form of the eternal Father, the figure of his substance (Heb. 1:3), true God of the true God, He nevertheless assumed the form and condition of a servant (Philip. 2:6-7). This Lady was the Mother of God, Queen of all creation, superior in excellence and dignity to all creatures, and yet She remained the humble servant of the least of them, and She would never accept homage and service as if due to Her, nor did She ever exalt Herself, or fail to judge Herself\* in the most humble manner. What shall we now say of our most execrable presumption and pride, since full of the abomination of sin we are so senseless as to claim for ourselves with dreadful insanity the homage and veneration of all the world? And if this is denied to us we quickly lose the little sense which our passions have left us. This entire divine History bears the stamp of humility and is a condemnation of our pride. And since it is not my office to teach or correct, but to be taught and to be corrected, I beseech and pray all the faithful children of the light to place this example before their eyes so we may humble ourselves in her presence.

238. It would not have been difficult for the Lord to preserve his most holy Mother from such extreme lowliness and the occasions in which She embraced it. He could have exalted Her before creatures, ordaining for Her to be renowned, honored and respected by all, just as He knew how to procure homage and renown for others, and as Assuerus did for Mardochai (Esther 6:10). Perhaps if this had been left to the judgment of men they would have so managed that a Woman more holy than all the hierarchies of heaven, and who bore in her womb the Creator of the angels and of the heavens, would be surrounded by a continual guard of honor, withdrawn from the gaze of men and receiving the homage of all the world. It would have seemed to them unworthy of Her to engage in humble and servile occupations, or not to have all things done only at her command, or to refuse homage, or not to exercise the fullest authority. So narrow is human wisdom, if that can be called wisdom which is so shortsighted. But such fallacy cannot creep into the true science of the saints, which is communicated to them by the infinite wisdom of the Creator, and which esteems at their just weight and price these honors, and does not barter the fates of the creatures.† The Most High would have denied his beloved Mother much and benefited Her little if He had deprived and withdrawn from Her the occasions of exercising the most profound humility, and had instead exposed Her to the exterior applause of men. It would also be a great loss to the world to be without this school of humility and this example for the humiliation and confusion of its pride.

239. From the time she received the Lord as her Guest in her house, though yet in the womb of the Virgin Mother, St. Elizabeth was much favored by God. By the ongoing talks and the familiar conversation with the heavenly Queen, and in proportion as she grew in the knowledge and understanding of the mysteries of the Incarnation, this great matron advanced in all manner

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\* cf. I Cor. 11:31 [Ed.]

† cf. Mk. 8:37 [Ed.]

of sanctity as one who draws it from its very fountain. A few times she merited to see most holy Mary during her prayers ravished and raised from the ground and altogether filled with divine splendor and beauty such that she could not have looked upon her face nor remain alive in her presence if she had not been strengthened by divine power. On these occasions, and at others whenever she could be witness of them without attracting the attention of most holy Mary, she prostrated herself and knelt in her presence, adoring the incarnate Word in the virginal temple of the Blessed Mother. All the mysteries which became known to her by the divine light, and by her dealings with the great Queen, St. Elizabeth sealed up in her bosom, being a most faithful depositary and prudent secretary of that which was confided to her. Only with her son John and with Zacharias, during the short time in which he lived after the birth of his son, did St. Elizabeth converse to some extent concerning those sacraments which had become known to all. But in all this she acted as a courageous, wise, and very holy woman.

*INSTRUCTION GIVEN TO ME BY MARY, THE MOST HOLY QUEEN.*

240. My daughter, the benefits of the Most High, and the awareness of his divine mysteries in the attentive souls, engender a kind of inclination toward and esteem of humility, which by a sweet and efficacious force raises them up to their legitimate and natural place, as lightness impels fire and gravity the stone. This is accomplished by the true light which places and establishes the creature in the clear knowledge of its own self, and attributes the works of grace to their origin from whom every perfect gift comes (James 1:17); thus each soul is established in its center. This is the most upright order of right reason, which trouble and as it were does violence against the false presumption of mortals. Due to this pride the heart in which it resides does not know how to crave contempt or consent to it, nor tolerate a superior, and is offended even at equals; all this does it violence as being alone above all. But for the humble heart, the greater the benefits it receives the more it annihilates itself, and from them in its serenity of heart is born a longing and an ardent yearning to abase itself and seek the last place; it feels oppressed in not finding itself the inferior of all and when it lacks humiliation.

241. In me, my dearest, thou shalt know the true practice of this doctrine, since none of the favors and benefits which the divine right hand bestowed upon me were small; yet never did my heart exalt itself, nor venture above itself in presumption (Ps. 130:1), nor know how to crave more than abasement and the last place among all creatures. The imitation of this I desire especially of thee, and to exert thy solicitude to be the least of all,\* to be commanded, abased, and reputed as useless, and in the presence of the Lord and of men thou must judge thyself as less than the very dust of the earth. Thou canst not deny that no generation has been more benefited than thou art, and no one has merited them less; thus how shalt thou repay this great debt if thou dost not humble thyself before all, and more than all the children of Adam, and if thou dost not engender exalted concepts and loving affections of humility? It is good to obey thy prelates and masters, and therefore thou must do it always. Yet I desire thee to go much farther and obey the least of thy fellow beings in all that is not sinful, as thou dost obey the highest superior; and regarding this it is my will for thee to be very studious as I was.

242. Only with thy subjects do I admonish thee to dispense this obedience with greater caution so they, not knowing thy desire to obey, may not desire thee to sometimes do what is not proper. Yet without losing their subjection, and without derogating from thy authority as their

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\* cf. Lk. 14:10 [Ed.]

superioress, thou canst accomplish much by giving them the example of always maintaining obedience in what is just. If anything displeasing or injurious is done to thee alone, thou must accept it with great esteem, without moving thy lips to defend thyself or complain. Offences against God thou must reprehend, without mixing thy cause with that of His Majesty, for thou must never find cause to defend thyself, but always defend the honor of God; yet neither in the one nor the other allow thyself to be moved by disorderly anger and irritation.\* I also desire thee to use great prudence in concealing and hiding the favors of the Lord; for the sacrament of the King is not to be lightly manifested (Tob. 12:7), nor are carnal men capable or worthy of the mysteries of the Holy Ghost (I Cor. 2:14). In all things imitate and follow me, since thou dost desire to be my beloved daughter; thou shalt attain this by obeying me, and this shall oblige the Almighty to strengthen and direct thy footsteps to that which He desires to accomplish in thee. Do not resist Him, but dispose and prepare thy heart to be pliant and ready to obey his light and grace. Let his grace be not void in thee (II Cor. 6:1), but labor diligently, and proceed to fill thy actions with perfection.

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\* cf. Lv. 19:17 [Ed.]