

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 that which 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 make known to Thee 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 prayers, especially for the salvation of men, and pray also that I withhold my justice in dealing with their incessant offenses against my bounty. Conjointly with thy prayers Thou shalt offer to Me the Lamb without spot (I Peter 1:19) whom Thou bearest in thy womb and 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. Not less solicitous was She 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 dear 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 comfort I feel therein; since I am the younger, it is proper that I serve not only thee as to my mother, but all in thy house. Deal with me as with thy servant as long as I am 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 Lord did not choose me for his Mother so I would receive reverence 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), to suffer and teach obedience and humility to mortals (Mt. 11:29), condemning pride and ostentation. Since therefore His Majesty teaches me this, and the Highest calls Himself the *reproach of men* (Ps. 21:7), how can I who am his slave and do not merit the company of creatures consent for thee, who art formed according to his image and likeness (Gen. 1:27), to serve me?"

235. St. Elizabeth still insisted and said: "My Lady and Protectress, this is true for those who do not know the sacrament which is enclosed in Thee. But I, who have without merit been informed by the Lord, will be very blamable in his eyes 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 answered: "My friend and sister, this reverence which thou dost owe and desire to give is due to the Lord whom I bear within my womb, for He is the true and highest Good and our Redeemer. But as far as I am concerned, who am a mere creature and among creatures only a poor worm, look upon me as I am in myself, although thou must adore the Creator who chose my poor self as his dwelling. By his divine enlightenment thou shalt give unto God what is due to Him, and allow me to perform that which pertains to me, namely to serve and to be below all. This I ask of thee for my consolation and in the name of the Lord whom I bear within me."

236. In such blessed and happy contentions most holy Mary and her cousin Elizabeth passed some of their time. But 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 of 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, and while reverencing her dignity she at the same time revered her Creator in his Mother. In her inmost heart she made the intention 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; however, St. Elizabeth never made use of them except to preserve them with the greatest veneration.

237. In this way most holy Mary put into practice the doctrine of the eternal Word, who humiliated 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 never would She accept homage and service as if due to Her, nor did She ever exalt Herself, or fail to judge of 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 for our humiliation 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 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

* cf. Mk. 8:37 [Ed.]

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 favors of the Most High and the knowledge of his divine mysteries in the attentive souls engender a kind of love and esteem of humility, which raises them up with a strong and sweet force like that which causes fire to ascend, and like gravity which causes a stone to fall, each of them striving to reach its own and natural sphere. This is done by the true light which places the creature in the possession of a clear knowledge of its own self, and attributes the graces to the proper source whence all perfect things come (James 1:17), and thus it brings all things into correct balance. This is the most proper order of right reason which overthrows and as it were exerts violence against the false presumption of mortals. Because of this presumption of pride the heart in which it resides cannot strive after contempt, nor bear it, nor can it suffer a superior over itself, and is offended even at equals; it violently opposes all in order to place itself alone above all fellow creatures. But the humble heart is abased in proportion to the benefits it receives, and in its interior quietly grows a desire or an ardent hunger for self-abasement and for the last place; it is violently disturbed in not finding itself esteemed as the inferior of all and in being deprived of humiliation.

241. In me, my dearest, thou shalt find exhibited the practical application of this doctrine, since none of the favors and blessings which the right hand of the Most High lavished upon me were insignificant. Yet never was my heart inflated with presumption above itself (Ps. 130:1), nor did it ever know anything else than to desire to be abased and to occupy the last place among all creatures. The imitation of this I desire especially of thee. Let thy ambition be to take the last place,* to live in subjection to all others; abased and considered as useless in the presence of the Lord and of men, thou must judge thyself as less than the dust of the earth itself. Thou canst not deny that in no generation has anyone been more favored than thee, and no one has merited these favors less than thee. How then shalt thou make any return for this great debt of gratitude if thou dost not humiliate thyself below all others and more than all the sons of Adam, and if thou dost not awaken within thyself exalted and loving sentiments concerning humility? It is good to obey the prelates and instructors, so therefore do it always. Yet I desire thee to go much farther and obey the most insignificant of thy fellow beings in all that is not sinful, and in such a way as if thou wert obeying the highest of thy superiors; and I desire thee in this matter to be very earnest as I was during my earthly life.

242. Thou must, however, be circumspect in regard to the obedience to thy inferiors lest they, knowing of thy anxiousness to obey in all things, seek to induce thee to obey in things unseemly

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

and unbecoming. Thou canst do much good by giving them the good and orderly example of obedience without causing them to lose any of their subjection and without derogating from thy authority as their superioress. If any disagreeable accident or injury occurs which affects thee alone accept it gladly, without so much as moving thy lips in self defense or making any complaints. Whatever is an injury to God do thou reprehend without mixing in any of thy own grievances with those of His Majesty, for thou must never find any cause for self defense, but always be ready to defend the honor of God; yet neither in the one nor the other allow thyself to be moved by disorderly anger and passion. I also desire thee to use great prudence in hiding and concealing 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; this thou shalt attain by obeying me, and thou shalt induce the Almighty to strengthen and direct thy footsteps to that which I desire to accomplish in thee. Do not resist Him, but dispose and prepare thy heart sweetly and quickly to obey his light and grace. Let grace not be void in thee (II Cor. 6:1), but labor diligently, and let thy actions be performed in all perfection.