

CHAPTER XVI

The Journey of Most Holy Mary to Visit St. Elizabeth, and Her Entrance into the House of Zacharias.

200. *And Mary rising up in those days* (says the sacred text) *went into the hill country with haste into a city of Juda* (Lk. 1:39). This rising up of our heavenly Queen signified not only her exterior preparations and departure from Nazareth on her journey, but it also signified the movement of her spirit and the divine impulse and command which directed Her to arise interiorly from the humble retirement which She had chosen in her humility. She arose as it were from the feet of the Most High, whose will and pleasure She eagerly sought to fulfill like the lowliest handmaid, who according to the word of David (Ps. 122:2) keeps her eyes fixed upon the hands of her mistress, awaiting her commands. Arising at the bidding of the Lord She lovingly hastened to accomplish his most holy will in procuring without delay the sanctification of the Precursor of the incarnate Word who was yet held prisoner in the womb of Elizabeth by the bonds of original sin. This was the purpose and object of this journey; hence the Princess of heaven arose and proceeded in diligent haste as mentioned by the Evangelist St. Luke.

201. Leaving behind then the house of her father and forgetting her people (Ps. 44:11), the most chaste spouses, Mary and Joseph, pursued their way to the house of Zacharias in mountainous Judea. It was twenty-seven leagues distant from Nazareth, and the greater part of the way was very rough and broken, unfit for such a delicate and tender Maiden. All the convenience at their disposal for the arduous undertaking was a humble beast upon which She began and pursued her journey. Although it was intended solely for her comfort and service, yet the most humble and unpretentious of all creatures many times dismounted and begged her spouse Joseph to lighten his labor and share with Her this comfort so the Saint could give himself some relief, making use of the little animal for this purpose. Her discreet spouse never accepted this offer, but in order to yield somewhat to the solicitations of the heavenly Lady he permitted Her now and then to walk with him part of the way whenever it seemed to him that her delicate strength could sustain the exertion without too much fatigue. But soon he would again ask Her with great modesty and reverence to accept this slight alleviation, and the celestial Queen would then obey and again proceed on her way seated in the saddle.

202. Thus alleviating their fatigue by humble and courteous contentions, most holy Mary and St. Joseph continued on their journey, making good use of each single moment. They proceeded alone, without accompaniment of any human creatures; but all the thousand Angels, who were set to guard the couch of Solomon, most holy Mary, attended upon them (Cant. 3:7). Although the Angels accompanied them in corporeal form, serving their great Queen and her most holy Son in her womb, they were visible only to Her. In the company of the Angels and of St. Joseph the Mother of Grace journeyed along, filling the fields and the mountains with the sweetest fragrance of her presence and with the divine praises in which She unceasingly occupied Herself. Sometimes She conversed with the Angels, and alternating with them sang divine canticles regarding the different mysteries of the Divinity, the works of creation, and the Incarnation. Thus ever anew the pure Heart of the immaculate Lady was inflamed by the ardors of divine love. In all this her spouse St. Joseph contributed his share by maintaining a discreet silence, allowing his beloved Spouse to pursue the flights of her spirit, for lost in highest contemplation he was favored with some understanding of what was passing within her soul.

203. At other times the two would converse with each other and speak about the salvation of souls and the mercies of the Lord, the coming of the Redeemer, the prophecies given to the ancient Fathers concerning Him, and other mysteries and sacraments of the Most High. Something happened on the way which caused great wonder in her holy spouse Joseph. He loved his Spouse most tenderly with a chaste and holy love, such as had been ordained in him by the special grace and dispensation of the divine love itself (Cant. 2:4). In addition to this privilege (which was certainly not a small one) the Saint was naturally of a most noble and courteous disposition, and his manners were most pleasing and charming. All this produced in him a most discreet and loving solicitude which was yet increased by the great holiness which he had seen from the beginning in his Spouse and which was ordained by heaven as the immediate object of all his privileges. Therefore the Saint anxiously attended upon most holy Mary and asked her many times whether She was tired or fatigued, and how he could serve Her on the journey. But as the Queen of heaven already carried within her virginal chamber the divine fire of the incarnate Word, St. Joseph (though ignorant of the cause) felt in his soul new effects proceeding from the words and conversations of his beloved Spouse. He felt himself so inflamed by divine love and imbued with such exalted knowledge of the mysteries touched upon in their conversations that he was entirely renewed and spiritualized by this burning interior light. The farther they proceeded and the more they conversed about these heavenly things so much the stronger these affections grew, and he became aware that it was the words of his Spouse which thus filled his heart with love and inflamed his will with divine ardor.

204. So great were these new feelings that the prudent Joseph could not help but pay the greatest attention to them. Though he knew all this came to him through the mediation of most holy Mary, and though it was a wonderful consolation to him that She was the cause, he meditated upon it without curiosity, and due to his great modesty he did not dare to ask Her any questions, the Lord having ordained it thus, for it was not yet time for him to know the sacrament of the King (Tob. 12:7) which was already consummated in her virginal womb. The heavenly Princess beheld the interior of her spouse, knowing all that passed within his soul, and in her prudence She reflected how it would naturally be unavoidable that he come to know of her pregnancy, for there would be no possibility of concealing it from her most beloved and chaste spouse. The great Lady did not know at the time how God would arrange this matter, and though She had not received any intimation or command to conceal this mystery, her heavenly prudence and discretion taught Her it would be proper to conceal it as a great sacrament, greater than all other mysteries. Therefore She kept it secret, saying not a word about it to her spouse, neither after the message of the Angel nor during this journey, nor later on during the anxieties occasioned to St. Joseph upon becoming aware of her pregnancy (375-94).

205. O admirable discretion and prudence more than human! The great Queen resigned Herself entirely to divine Providence, hoping that God would arrange all things; yet She felt a certain concern and pain in anticipation of what her holy spouse would have to bear, and considering that She could not remove this burden from him beforehand nor divert it from him. This concern was increased by the attentive care and service lavished by him upon Her with so much love and affection, since his faithful services certainly deserved a corresponding return on her part as far as was prudently possible. In this difficulty She offered a special prayer to the Lord, offering Him her careful solicitude and desires that St. Joseph make a wise decision when this expected occasion would arrive, praying that both of them receive the needed divine assistance and direction. In this state of suspense in which She found Herself Her Highness performed great and heroic acts of faith, hope and charity, of prudence, humility, patience and fortitude,

communicating the plenitude of sanctity to all She offered, since in everything She worked what was most perfect.

206. This journey was the first pilgrimage begun by the incarnate Word, four days after He had entered the world, for his most ardent love would not suffer any longer delay or procrastination in enkindling the fire which He came to scatter in the world (Lk. 12:49), and in beginning his justification of mortals with his Precursor. This promptness He communicated also to his holy Mother so with haste She would arise and proceed to visit Elizabeth (Lk. 1:39). The most heavenly Lady on this occasion served as the couch of the true Solomon, but much more richly adorned and more elegant, as Solomon himself infers in the Canticles (3:9-10). Therefore this journey was glorious and occasioned great joy to the Onlybegotten of the Father, for He traveled at his ease in the virginal chamber of his Mother, enjoying the sweet tokens of her love. At the time She alone was the archive of this Treasure, the secretary of so great a sacrament, and She adored Him, blessed and admired Him, spoke and listened to Him, and answered Him; She revered Him and thanked Him for Herself and for all the human race, much more than all men and angels together.

207. In the course of the journey, which lasted four days, the two pilgrims most holy Mary and Joseph exercised not only the virtues which were interior and had God for their immediate object, but also many other outward acts of charity toward their neighbor, for most holy Mary could not remain idle at the sight of want. They did not find the same hospitable treatment at all the inns of the road, for some of the innkeepers, being more rude, treated them with slight consideration in accordance with their natural disposition, while others received them with true love inspired by divine grace. But the Mother of Mercy denied to no one such help as She could administer, and therefore whenever She could decently do so She hastened to visit and hunt up the poor, infirm and afflicted, helping them and consoling them, or curing their sicknesses. I will not stop to relate all that happened on the way, but will only mention the good fortune of a poor sick girl whom our great Queen found in passing through a town on the first day of her journey. She was moved to most tender compassion at the sight of her grievous illness, and making use of her power as Mistress of the creatures She commanded the fever to leave the maiden and the humors to recompose and reduce themselves to their natural state and condition. At this command and the sweet presence of the purest Mother the sick maiden was suddenly freed and healed from her pains of body and benefited in soul, and afterwards she lived more and more perfectly and attained the state of sanctity, for the image of the Authoress of her happiness remained stamped within her memory, and her heart was enkindled with a great love toward the heavenly Lady, though she never saw Her again, nor was the miracle ever made public.

208. Having pursued their journey four days most holy Mary and her spouse arrived at the town of Juda, where Zacharias and Elizabeth then lived. This was the special and proper name of the place where the parents of St. John lived for awhile, and therefore the Evangelist St. Luke specifies it, calling it Juda (Lk. 1:39), although the commentators have commonly believed this was not the name of the town in which Elizabeth and Zacharias lived but simply the name of the province, which was called Juda or Judea, just as for the same reason the mountains south of Jerusalem were called the mountains of Judea. But it was expressly revealed to me that the town was called Juda and that the Evangelist calls it by its proper name, though the learned expositors have understood by this name of Juda the province in which that town was situated. This confusion arose from the fact that some years after the death of Christ the town of Juda was destroyed, and since the commentators found no trace of such a town they inferred St. Luke

meant the province and not a town; hence the great differences of opinion in regard to the place where most holy Mary visited Elizabeth are easily explained.

209. And because I have been ordered in holy obedience to manifest this point more precisely due to the sense of novelty which might be caused, and having done that which I was commanded, I say that the house in which the Visitation took place was built upon the very spot on which now the faithful pilgrims who travel to or live in the Holy Land venerate the divine mysteries transacted during the visit. Although the town of Juda itself, where the house of Zacharias stood, is ruined, the Lord did not permit the memory of the venerable locality in which those great mysteries transpired, and which were hallowed by the footsteps of most holy Mary, of Christ our Lord, and of the Baptist as well as his holy parents, to be blotted out and effaced from the memory of men. Therefore possessing the divine light the ancient faithful built up those churches and restored the Holy Places in order to recognize by this light and by certain tradition the truth of all of this, and renew the memory of such an admirable sacrament, and so we faithful now living can rejoice in the benefit of venerating and worshipping them, proclaiming and confessing the Catholic faith in the Sacred Places of our Redemption.

210. For the better understanding of these things let it be remembered that after the demon had become aware on Calvary that Christ our Lord was God and the Redeemer of men, he sought with incredible fury to blot out the remembrance of Him from the land of the living as Jeremias says (Jer. 11:19), and the same is to be said of the memory of his most holy Mother. Thus he managed to have the most holy Cross hidden, buried under ground, and delivered as a spoil of war to the Persians, and in the same way he procured the ruin and obliteration of many of the Holy Places. For this reason the holy Angels carried back and forth so many times the venerable and holy house of Loreto, for the same dragon who pursued the heavenly Lady (Apoc. 12:13) had already excited the minds of the inhabitants of that land to tear down and raze to the ground that most sacred oratory which had been the workshop of the Most High in the mystery of the Incarnation. The same astute hatred of the enemy urged him to blot out the town of Juda, aided partly by the negligence of the inhabitants who gradually died off, and partly also by disasters and unfortunate happenings. Yet the Lord did not allow all traces of the house of Zacharias to be effaced or obliterated due to the sacraments which were there enacted.

211. This town was distant from Nazareth, as I have said, twenty-seven leagues and about two leagues from Jerusalem, and it was situated in that part of the Judean mountains where the stream Sorec takes its origin. After the birth of St. John and the return of most holy Mary and St. Joseph to Nazareth, St. Elizabeth received a divine revelation that a great calamity and slaughter impended over the infants of Bethlehem and its vicinity (Mt. 2:16). And though this revelation was indeterminate and unclear, it nevertheless induced the mother of St. John to go with Zacharias her husband to Hebron, which was eight leagues more or less from Jerusalem, for they were rich and noble and had houses and estates not only in Juda and Hebron but also in other places. When most holy Mary and Joseph, fleeing from Herod, were traveling to Egypt (Ib. 14), some months after the Nativity of the Word, and even longer after the birth of the Baptist, St. Elizabeth and Zacharias were then in Hebron. Zacharias died four months after our Lord was born, which was ten months after the birth of his son John. It seems to me I have now sufficiently solved this doubt, and it ought to be evident that the house of the Visitation was neither in Jerusalem nor Bethlehem nor Hebron, but in the town called Juda. I saw that this is the true explanation which was made known to me by divine light together with the other mysteries of this divine History; afterwards, when I was constrained by obedience to ask about this matter, a holy Angel again made the same declaration to me.

212. It was at this city of Juda and at the house of Zacharias that most holy Mary and Joseph arrived. In order to announce their visit the holy spouse Joseph hastened ahead, and calling out saluted the inhabitants of the house, saying: "The Lord be with you and fill your souls with divine grace." Elizabeth was already forewarned, for the Lord himself had informed her in a vision that Mary of Nazareth had departed to visit her. She had also in this vision been made aware that the heavenly Lady was most pleasing in the eyes of the Most High, while the mystery of her being the Mother of God was not revealed to her until the moment when they both saluted each other in private. Elizabeth immediately issued forth with a few of her family in order to welcome most holy Mary, who as the more humble and younger in years first saluted her cousin, saying: "The Lord be with you, my dearest cousin." Elizabeth answered: "The same Lord reward you for having come in order to give me this pleasure." With these words they entered the house of Zacharias, and what then happened I will relate in the following chapter.

INSTRUCTION WHICH OUR QUEEN AND LADY GAVE ME.

213. My daughter, whenever the creature holds in proper esteem the good works and services which the Lord commands for his glory, it will feel within itself great ease of operation, great sweetness in undertaking them, and a readiness and alacrity in continuing and pursuing them, and these effects give testimony of the truth and usefulness of these works. But the soul cannot feel this result and experience if it is not very submissive to the Lord, raising its eyes and looking for his divine pleasure in order to hear it with joy and execute it with alacrity, forgetting its own inclination and convenience. The soul must be like the faithful servant who seeks to do only the will of his master and not his own. This is the manner of obeying which is fruitful and which is due from creatures to their God, and much more from all the religious, who explicitly promise this kind of obedience. So thou, my dearest, mayest perfectly attain it, remember with what esteem David in many places speaks of the precepts, the sayings, and the justifications of the Lord, and remember the effects which they caused in that Prophet and even now in souls. He says they make the infants wise (Ps. 18:8) and rejoice the human heart (Ib. 9), enlighten the eyes of the soul so they become a most brilliant light for its footsteps (Ps. 118:105), and are more sweet than honey (Ps. 18:11), more desirable and more estimable than the most precious stones. This promptitude and subjection to the divine will and to his laws made David so conformable to the Heart of God. These are the kind of souls His Majesty seeks for his servants and friends (I Kg. 13:14; Acts 13:22).

214. Attend therefore, my daughter, with solicitude to the works of virtue and perfection which thou knowest to be desirable in the eyes of the Lord. Despise none of them nor withdraw from any of them, and cease not to exercise them, no matter how violently thy inclinations and thy weakness oppose their exercise. Trust in the Lord and proceed to put them into execution, and soon his power shall overcome all difficulties. Soon thou shalt also know by happy experience how light is the burden and how sweet is the yoke of the Lord (Mt. 11:30). He did not deceive us when He spoke those words, as might be argued by the tepid and the negligent, who in their torpidity and distrust tacitly repudiate the truth of this statement. I desire also that in order to imitate me in this perfection thou take notice of the favor which the divine condescension vouchsafed to me in furnishing me with a most sweet love and affection for creatures as participants in the divine goodness and existence. In this love I sought to console, alleviate and enliven all souls, and by a natural compassion I procured all spiritual and corporeal good for them. To none of them, no matter how great a sinner he might have been, did I wish any evil; on

the contrary, I was urged by the great compassion of my tender heart to procure for them eternal salvation. From this also arose my concern for the grief of my spouse Joseph which he would have upon becoming aware of my pregnancy, for to him I owed more than to all other creatures. Tender compassion filled my heart, especially for the suffering and the infirm, and I tried to obtain some relief for all. In these virtues then I desire thee to imitate me most prudently, making use of the knowledge of them given to thee.