

CHAPTER XXIII

The Counsels and Instruction which Most Holy Mary Gave to St. Elizabeth at Her Request; St. John is Circumcised and Receives His Name, and Zacharias Prophesies.

283. The Precursor of Christ having already been born, the return of most holy Mary to Nazareth was inevitable; and though St. Elizabeth as prudent and wise conformed herself to the divine will in this matter, thus partly moderating her sorrow, nevertheless she desired to somewhat compensate her loneliness by the teaching and doctrine of the Mother of Wisdom. Hence she spoke to Her and said: “My Lady and Mother of my Creator, I know Thou art already preparing for thy departure, and in my loneliness I shall be deprived of thy loving company, help and protection. I beseech Thee, my cousin, in preparation for thy absence Thou leave me with some instruction to help me in governing all my actions for the greater pleasure of the Most High. In thy virginal womb Thou bearest the Master who is the corrector of the wise (Wis. 7:15) and the very fountain of light; through Him we come to participate in all good. Communicate to thy servant some of the rays which illumine thy purest soul so I may be enlightened in the straight paths of justice (Ps. 22:3) until I come to see the God of gods in Sion” (Ps. 83:8).

284. These words of St. Elizabeth moved most holy Mary to tender compassion, and She spoke words which served her cousin as celestial guidance for the rest of her life, which She said would be of short duration; yet the Most High would take care of her child, and She herself had prayed for him to the Almighty. Although it is not possible to record all the sweet words of counsel which the heavenly Lady spoke to St. Elizabeth before her departure, I shall write down some of them as far as I have understood them and can be reproduced by our insufficient language. Most holy Mary said: “My friend and cousin, the Lord has selected thee for his works and most high sacraments, for which He has condescended to communicate to thee such light, and He desires me to open to thee my heart; in it I have written thy name for presentation before His Majesty. I shall not forget the humble kindness which thou hast shown toward me, the most useless of creatures, and from my most holy Son and Lord I hope thou shalt receive a copious reward.

285. “Always lift thy mind and spirit on high, and by the light of the grace thou hast do not lose the vision of the immutable being of the infinite and eternal God, and the condescension of his immense goodness which moved Him to create from nothing all the intellectual creatures in order to raise them to his glory and enrich them with his gifts. This common debt of all creatures the Most High made more our own when by his mercy He gave us such knowledge and light before all others; this ought to incite us to recompense by our gratitude the blind ingratitude of mortals, who by it are even further from knowing and magnifying their Creator. This must be our obligation, detaching our hearts so free and unhindered we may advance toward his blissful end. For this, my friend, I earnestly charge thee to withdraw and turn away from all earthly things, even from thy own possessions, so freed from earthly impediments thou mayest raise thyself to the divine calls. Hope in the coming of the Lord, so when He arrives thou mayest respond with joy (Lk. 12:36) and without the sorrowful violence the soul feels when it is time to separate from the body and all the rest which it loved excessively. Now is the time to suffer and acquire the crown, gain merits, and hasten to arrive at the intimate union with our true and highest Good.

286. “Regarding Zacharias, thy husband and head, for the time he has left to live seek with special earnestness to love, serve and obey him. Regarding thy miraculous child, continually offer him to his Creator; in His Majesty and for Him thou canst love him as a mother, for he shall be a great Prophet, and with the zeal of Elias which the Most High shall give him he shall defend

his law and honor, and procure the exaltation of his holy Name (Mal. 4:5; Lk. 1:17; Jn. 1:7). My most holy Son, who has chosen him for his Precursor and the ambassador of his coming and doctrine, shall favor him as his beloved and fill him with gifts of his right hand (Mt. 11:9) and make him great and admirable from generation unto generations, manifesting to the world his grandeur and sanctity.

287. “For thy entire house and family make sure they fear, venerate and reverence the holy Name of our God and Lord of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And above this be careful to generously favor the needs of the poor as much as possible (Tob. 4:7-8). Enrich them with the temporal goods abundantly conceded to thee by the Most High, so with the same generosity thou dispense them to the needy; for these goods are more theirs than yours, since all are the children of one Father who is in heaven, to whom all creation belongs. It is not reasonable for the child of a rich father to live in superfluity while his brethren lives poor and destitute; in this thou canst make thyself especially pleasing to the God of undying mercy. Continue to do this, and execute what thou hast planned, since Zacharias has remitted this work to thee according to thy disposition; by this permission thou canst be generous. In all the works imposed upon thee by the Lord confirm thy hope, and with creatures be kind, meek, humble, gentle, and very patient, with interior joy of thy soul, though some shall be instruments for thy labor and crown. For the most exalted mysteries God has manifested to thee bless Him eternally, and beseech Him for the salvation of souls with incessant love and zeal. Regarding myself, pray that His Majesty govern and guide me so I may worthily and according to his pleasure administer the sacrament which his immense goodness has confided to such a lowly and poor servant. Send for my spouse so he can accompany me home. In the meanwhile prepare for the circumcision of thy child and call him John, since this name was given to him by the Most High by a decree of his immutable will” (Lk. 1:13).

288. These counsels of most holy Mary, together with other words of eternal life, produced in the heart of St. Elizabeth such divine affections that for a time she was lost in the exalted teachings and sentiments of these heavenly doctrines and made mute by the force of the spiritual light infused into her, for the Lord, by means of the living words of his most pure Mother, enlivened and renewed the heart of his servant. When the flow of her tears had moderated she answered: “My Lady and Queen of all creation, between my sorrow and consolation I am speechless; hear the words formed in my inmost heart, which my tongue cannot express. My affections shall speak what my lips cannot manifest. To the Almighty I refer the return of that with which Thou hast favored me, since He is the Rewarder of what we poor receive. I only beseech Thee, since in all things Thou art my Helper and the cause of my good, to obtain for me the grace and strength to execute thy doctrine and bear my great sorrow due to the absence of thy sweet company.”

289. Then they spoke of the arrangements for the circumcision of the child since the time appointed by the law was approaching. Complying with the custom observed among the Jews, especially among the more distinguished, many relatives and other acquaintances of the house of Zacharias began to gather in order to resolve upon the name to be given to the child, for in addition to the ordinary preparations and consultations concerning the name to be given to a son, the high position of Zacharias and Elizabeth, and the news of the miraculous fecundity of the mother, naturally suggested the existence of some great mystery to the minds of all their relations. Zacharias was still mute, and therefore it was necessary for St. Elizabeth to preside at this meeting. Beyond the opinion and veneration which others had of her, she was so renewed and sanctified after the visit and knowledge of the Queen of heaven, her mysteries and extended

conversation, that all her relatives and neighbors, and many others, noticed this change, because manifested in her countenance was a resplendent nobility which made her admirable and venerable, being recognizable as the reflection of the rays of the Divinity, in whose presence she lived.

290. At this meeting was present also the heavenly Lady Mary, because St. Elizabeth had earnestly besought Her, and in order to prevail in this had interposed a type of very reverent and humble command. The great Lady obeyed, yet begged the Most High not to make known any of her great privileges lest She draw upon Herself the applause or veneration of others. The desire of the most Humble among the humble was granted, for since the world persists in ignoring those who fail to use ostentation, nobody took particular notice of Her except St. Elizabeth, who looked upon Her with outward and inward reverence, and who knew that upon Her depended the success of this consultation. As is recorded in the Gospel of St. Luke, some of those present in the meeting suggested the infant be named Zacharias after his father (Lk. 1:59), but the prudent mother, assisted by most holy Mary, said: "My son must be named John" (Ib. 60-1). Her relatives objected that none of their family bore that name, for the names of illustrious forefathers were always held in great esteem and were preferred in order to incite their bearers to the imitation of ancestral virtues. St. Elizabeth again insisted that the child must be called John.

291. Although Zacharias was mute, the relatives desired him to express his opinion in the matter, and asking them for the pen he wrote: *Johannes est nomen ejus, John is his name* (Ib. 62-3). At the same time he wrote this most holy Mary, using her power conceded to Her by God as Queen over all creation, commanded the muteness to leave him and his tongue to be loosened, since the moment had arrived when it should bless the Lord. At this heavenly command he found himself freed from his affliction, and to the astonishment and fear of all present he began to speak, as the Gospel relates (Ib. 64-5). And though it is true the Archangel St. Gabriel, as apparent in the same Gospel (Ib. 20), told Zacharias that because of his incredulity he would be mute until the accomplishment of that which he had announced to him, yet this is not contrary to what I have said above, because the Lord when He reveals a certain decree of his divine will, though it is efficacious and absolute, does not always declare the means by which it shall be executed, which He foresees in his infinite science. Thus the Angel declared to Zacharias the punishment of his unbelief, but he did not tell him he would be freed from it by the intercession of most holy Mary, although this had also been foreseen and decreed.

292. Hence, just as the voice of Mary our Lady was the instrument for the sanctification of the child John and his mother, so her secret mandate and intercession had the effect of loosening the tongue of Zacharias, filling him with the Holy Ghost and the gift of prophecy, and he said (Lk. 1:68-79):

68. Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, because He hath visited and wrought the redemption of his people;

69. And hath raised up a horn of salvation to us, in the house of David his servant;

70. As He spoke by the mouth of his holy Prophets, who are from the beginning;

71. Salvation from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us;

72. To perform mercy to our fathers, and to remember his holy Testament,

73. The oath, which He swore to Abraham our father, that He would grant to us,

74. That being delivered from the hand of our enemies, we may serve Him without fear,

75. In holiness and justice before Him, all our days.

76. And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest; for thou shalt go before the

face of the Lord to prepare his ways;

77. To give knowledge of salvation to his people, unto the remission of their sins;

78. Through the bowels of the mercy of our God, in which the Orient from on high hath visited us;

79. To enlighten them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death; to direct our feet into the way of peace.

293. In this divine canticle Zacharias abridged all of the highest mysteries which the ancient Prophets had foretold in a more profuse manner concerning the divinity, humanity and Redemption of Christ, and in these few words he embraces many great sacraments. He also understood them by the grace and light which filled his spirit and which raised him up in the sight of all who had come to attend the circumcision of his son, for all of them witnessed the miracle of the loosening of his tongue and his divine prophecies. Concerning the intelligence which the holy priest had concerning them it will not be easy for me to give an explanation.

294. *Blessed be the Lord God of Israel* he says, knowing the Most High, merely by desiring it or by speaking one word, could have worked the redemption of his people and given them eternal salvation; yet He, the Son of the eternal Father himself, exerted not only his power but showed also his immense goodness and mercy in coming down to visit his people in order to become their Brother in his human nature, their Master by his doctrine and example, and their Redeemer by his life, Passion and Death of the cross. At these words Zacharias understood the union of the two natures in the Person of the Word, and in heavenly clearness he saw this mystery realized in the virginal bridal chamber of most holy Mary. He understood also the exaltation of the humanity of the Word by the triumph which was to be achieved by Christ, God and man, in earning salvation for the human race according to the divine promises made to David, his father and ancestor (II Kings 7:12; Ps. 131:11). He understood the same promise had been made to the whole world by the prophecies of the Saints and Patriarchs from the beginning, for from the first creation God began to direct the course of nature and grace toward his coming into the world, directing all his works since the time of Adam toward this same happy end.

295. He understood the Most High in this manner provided for us the means of obtaining grace and eternal life lost by our enemies in their pride and stubborn disobedience which hurled them into hell, and the seats which would have been theirs if they had been obedient were reserved for the obedient among mortals. He saw, however, since that time the enmity which the serpent had conceived against God was now turned against men because we were decreed and enshrined in the eternal mind according to his divine will (Apoc. 12:17); how Adam and Eve, our first parents, having fallen from his friendship and grace, were not given over to chastisement like the rebellious angels, but were raised to a state of hope (Wis. 10:2); and in order to assure their descendants of his mercy God provided the prophecies and figures of the Old Testament, which were to be ratified and fulfilled in the New Testament by the coming of the Repairer and Redeemer. And in order to make this hope more secure it was promised to our father Abraham by the firmness of the oath He gave him, affirming that he would be the father of his people and of the faith (Gen. 22:16, 18). Assured of this stupendous and vast blessing, namely that of receiving his own Son made man, we may serve God free from the fear of our enemies, for by our adoption and regeneration (Gal. 4:5) they are already overcome and subdued through our Redeemer.

296. So we may understand what the eternal Word has earned for us in restoring to us this liberty in the service of God, he says He has renewed the world in sanctity and justice, and founded the new law of grace for all the days of this world and for the time of life given to each

of the children of the Church; in it they not only can but should live in holiness and justice. And since Zacharias saw in his son John the beginning of all these sacraments, he turned toward him and offered him his congratulations, intimating to him and prophesying his dignity, sanctity and ministry, saying: *And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest, for thou shalt go before his face* (which is his divinity) *and prepare his ways* by spreading the light of his coming and giving notice to the people of the Jews concerning eternal life, which is Christ our Lord, the promised Messiah (Mk. 1:4). Thus can they dispose themselves by the baptism of penance for the remission of their sins and become convinced the Messiah has come to take away not only their sins but those of the whole world (Jn. 1:29), since it is through his mercy, and not because of our merits (Titus 3:5), He deigns to visit us by descending from on high from the bosom of the eternal Father, being born as man to bring light to those ignorant of the truth for so many ages, who have been and are sitting in darkness and in the shadow of eternal death, and directing his steps and ours in the way of the true peace which we await.

297. Much more clearly than I can explain did Zacharias perceive these mysteries in their plenitude and depth, and express them in his prophecies. Some of those present were likewise enlightened, becoming aware that the time of the Messiah and the fulfillment of the ancient prophecies had arrived. Full of astonishment at these unexpected wonders and prodigies they exclaimed (Lk. 1:66): “Who shall this child be, with whom the hand of the Lord shows itself so powerful and admirable?” In accordance with the letter of the law, and with the concurrence of his father and mother, the child was then circumcised and named John, and the report of these wonders spread through all the mountains of Judea (Ib. 65).

298. Queen of the universe, I admire the wonderful works wrought through thy intervention by the arm of the Lord in his servants Elizabeth, John and Zacharias. At the same time I reflect upon the different courses pursued by divine Providence and upon thy rare discretion. Thy most sweet voice served the son and the mother as an instrument of sanctification, filling them with the Holy Ghost, and this remained hidden; however, so Zacharias could regain his speech and be enlightened, Thou interposed only thy secret prayer and command, and this benefit was manifested to all the bystanders, revealing the effects of the grace of God in the holy priest. I cannot find the reason for this diversity, and therefore I make known to Thee my ignorance so Thou mayest instruct me as my Teacher.

*ANSWER AND INSTRUCTION OF THE QUEEN
AND MISTRESS OF THE WORLD.*

299. For two reasons, my daughter, the divine effects wrought through me by my Son in St. John and his mother Elizabeth were concealed, and not those of Zacharias. First, because Elizabeth spoke out clearly in praise of the incarnate Word and of me, yet at the time it was not proper for either this mystery or my dignity to be openly known, since the coming of the Messiah was to be manifested by other more appropriate means. Second, not all hearts were so well prepared as that of Elizabeth for receiving such precious and unprecedented seed of divine knowledge, nor would they have welcomed such sacramental revelation with due reverence; on the other hand, it was more becoming for the priest Zacharias by his dignity to proclaim what was then to be made known, for the beginnings of the heavenly light would be accepted more readily from him than from St. Elizabeth, especially while he was present. What she said was reserved to bring forth its effects in due time. Though the words of God have their own inherent

force, yet the more sweet and acceptable manner of communicating with the ignorant and the unskilled in divine mysteries is by means of the priest.

300. Likewise it was proper for the dignity and honor of the priesthood to receive its due, for the Most High holds the priests in such esteem (Ps. 104:15) that if He finds them in the right disposition He exalts them and fills them with his Spirit so the world might venerate them as his chosen and anointed ones; moreover, the wonders of the Lord run less risk in priests, even when they are more openly revealed to them. If they correspond to their dignity their works would be like those of the Seraphim, and their semblance like the Angels among the rest of creatures. Their countenance should be resplendent like that of Moses when he came forth from the presence and conversation with the Lord (Ex. 34:29); at least they should deal with the rest of men in such a manner that they are honored and revered as next to God. I desire thee to understand, my dearest, that the Most High is greatly incensed against the world in this matter, as well against the priests as against laity: Against the priests because forgetting their exalted dignity they outrage it by making themselves vile and contemptible, scandalizing many, and giving bad example to the world occasioned by the contempt of their sanctification; and against the laity because they are bold and daring toward the anointed of the Lord, who even if they are imperfect and do not possess a commendable reputation, nevertheless the laity must honor and reverence them as taking the place on earth of Christ my most holy Son.

301. Due to this veneration of the priest I also proceeded differently with St. Elizabeth, for though the Lord desired me to be the instrument by which the divine Spirit would be communicated to her and her son, yet I saluted Elizabeth in such a manner that I at the same time showed a certain superiority in order to command the original sin her son had, for by means of my words this sin was forgiven him, and both mother and son were filled with the Holy Ghost. Since I had not contracted original sin and was exempt from it I possessed dominion over it on this occasion; I commanded it as the Lady who had triumphed over it by the preservation of the Lord (Gen. 3:15), and who was not a slave of it as all the sons of Adam who sinned in him (Rom. 5:12). Hence the Lord desired that in order to free John from the slavery and chains of sin I would command it as one who was never subject to its bondage. I did not salute Zacharias in this authoritative way, but rather prayed for him, observing the reverence and decorum due to his dignity and my modesty. I would not have commanded the tongue of the priest to be loosened, not even mentally and secretly, if the Most High had not enjoined it upon me, intimating at the same time that the defect of speech hardly suited his office, since a priest should stand ready to serve and praise the Almighty with all his powers. In regard to the respect due to priests I shall tell thee more on another occasion; let this suffice at present for the solution of thy doubt.

302. The instruction I now give thee is to seek instruction in the way of virtue and eternal life from all persons with whom thou dost converse, superiors or inferiors. Imitate me therein and my cousin Elizabeth, with due discretion asking all to direct thee and guide thee, for in return for such humility the Lord shall provide thee with secure counsel and divine light for exercising thy discreet and sincere love of virtue. Seek also to cast away from thee or not permit any type or hint of flattery from creatures, and avoid the conversations which expose thee to it, for such deceitful pleasure darkens the light and perverts the unsuspecting mind (Wis. 4:11). The Lord is so jealous of the souls especially beloved by Him that He will immediately turn away from them if they find pleasure in the praises of men and seek to recompense themselves by their flatteries, since by this triviality they become unworthy of his favors. It is not possible to unite in a soul the adulations of the world and the caresses of the Most High, for these latter are sincere, holy, pure and lasting; they humiliate, cleanse, pacify and illumine the heart; while on the other hand the

flatteries of creatures are vain, fleeting, deceitful, impure and false, issuing from the mouths of those who are all liars (Ps. 115:11; Jn. 8:44), and whatever is deceitful is a work of the enemy.

303. Thy Spouse, my dearest daughter, does not desire thy ears to be enthralled by deceitful earthly talk, nor contaminated by the flatteries of the world; hence I desire thee to keep them closed and well guarded against all these poisonous influences. If thy Lord is pleased to speak to thy heart the words of eternal life, it is proper for thee to be deaf and lifeless to all that is earthly; all else should be to thee a deadly torment in comparison with the caresses of his love. Remember thou owest Him the perfection of thy love, and that all hell will unite against thee in order to ensnare thee by thy natural tenderness to be sweet and loving toward creatures and less grateful to the eternal God. Watch over thyself, and make sure to resist this unfaithfulness (I Peter 5:9), trusting in thy beloved Master and Spouse.