

CHAPTER XXIV

Mary Most Holy Leaves the House of Zacharias in order to Return to Her Own Home in Nazareth.

304. In order to return with most holy Mary to her house in Nazareth the most happy spouse Joseph came to Her, called for this purpose by St. Elizabeth. Upon arriving at the house of Zacharias he was welcomed with indescribable reverence and devotion by Elizabeth and Zacharias, for now also the holy priest knew the great Patriarch was the depository of the sacraments and treasures of heaven, though this was yet unknown to him. His heavenly Spouse received him in modest and discreet jubilation, and kneeling before him She as usual sought his blessing and also his pardon for having failed to serve him for nearly three months during her attendance upon her cousin Elizabeth. Though in this She had committed neither sin nor imperfection, having complied with the divine will with great pleasure and complaisance of the Lord himself and in conformity with her spouse, yet by this courteous and endearing act of humility the most prudent Lady desired to recompense her spouse for the lack of her consoling companionship. St. Joseph answered that as he now again saw Her, and again enjoyed her delightful presence, he was relieved of the pain caused by her absence. After resting a day, they determined to depart.

305. Thereupon the princess Mary took leave of the priest Zacharias. Since he had already been enlightened by the Lord concerning her dignity, he addressed Her with the greatest reverence as to the living sanctuary of the divinity and humanity of the eternal Word. "My Lady," he said, "praise eternally and bless thy Maker, who by his infinite mercy has condescended to choose Thee among all creatures for his Mother and the sole Depository of all his great goods and sacraments. Remember me, thy servant, and beseech our Lord and God to lead me in peace from this exile to the security of the eternal peace for which we hope, and that through Thee I may merit to become worthy to arrive at the vision of his divine countenance, which is the glory of the saints. And remember also, O Lady, my house and family, and especially my son John, and pray to the Most High for thy people."

306. The great Lady knelt before him and in profound humility asked him to bless Her. This Zacharias hesitated to do, and instead asked Her to give him her blessing. But nothing could overcome her humility, She who was the Teacher of that virtue and of all sanctity, and therefore She importuned the priest for his blessing until he yielded to the impulse of the divine light. In the words of Holy Scripture, he said to Her: "The right arm of the almighty and true God assist Thee always, and *keep Thee from all evil* (Ps. 120:7). Possess thou the grace of his efficacious protection (Ib. 5), and be filled with the *dew of heaven and of the fatness of the earth* (Gen. 27:28), and may He give Thee abundance of bread and wine (Ib.). *Let the peoples serve Thee and the tribes worship Thee* (Ib. 29), since Thou art the tabernacle of God (Ecclus. 24:12); *be Thou Lady of thy brethren, and let thy mother's children kneel in thy presence* (Gen. 27:29). He who magnifies and blesses Thee shall be exalted and blessed, and those who bless and praise Thee not shall be cursed (Ib.). In Thee let all nations know God, and through Thee may the Name of the most high God of Jacob be magnified" (Judith 13:31).

307. In return for this prophetic blessing most holy Mary kissed the hand of the priest and asked him to forgive Her the faults committed in his house. The saintly old man was much moved by these parting words of the most pure and amiable of creatures, and ever thereafter bore hidden within him the memory of the mysteries revealed to him concerning most holy Mary.

Only once, when he was present at a meeting of the priests in the temple who were congratulating him because of the birth of his son and the restoration of his speech, was he moved by the excess of his joy and answered them: "I believe with assured firmness the Most High has visited us and already sent into the world the promised Messiah who shall redeem his people." But he spoke no further of what he really knew of the mystery. The holy priest Simeon, however, who was present and heard these words, was seized with great joy of spirit and by divine impulse exclaimed: "Do not permit, Lord God of Israel, thy servant to depart from this valley of miseries before he has seen thy salvation and the Repairer of his people." To this prayer he afterwards alluded when at the Presentation of the infant God in the temple he received Him into his arms (Lk. 2:25ff.) as we shall see later on (599). Until that event took place he desired more and more ardently to see the incarnate Word.

308. Leaving Zacharias in tears, Mary our Lady went to her cousin Elizabeth, who as a woman of most tender heart, as a relative, as one who for so many days had enjoyed the sweet conversation of the Mother of Grace, and by whose intercession had received so much from the hand of the Lord, was almost overcome with grief at the mere thought of now losing the source whence so many blessings had flowed and were yet to flow if she could only retain it. Hence when the time for taking leave of the Lady of heaven and earth finally arrived her heart was torn with sorrow, and she could say only a few words amid her copious tears and sighs revealing her inmost soul. The most serene Queen, being unconquered and superior to all the movements of the natural passions, with a pleasing strictness ruled over them as mistress; and speaking to Elizabeth She said: "My friend and cousin, do not afflict thyself so much over my departure, since the charity of the Most High, in whom I truly love thee, knows neither separation nor distance of time or place. In His Majesty I behold thee, and in Him thou art present; likewise thou shalt always find me in his presence. Brief is the time of our bodily separation, since all the days of human life are so fleeting (Job 14:5), and gaining victory by divine grace over our enemies we shall very soon see and enjoy each other in the celestial Jerusalem, where there is neither sorrow, nor weeping (Apoc. 21:4), nor separation. Until then, my beloved, thou shalt find all good in the Lord, and thou shalt also possess and see me in Him. He shall remain in thy heart and console thee." Our most prudent Queen said no more to allay the grief of St. Elizabeth; instead She knelt down at her feet and asked her blessing and pardon for what might have been bothersome in her company. She made this request until it was granted, and St. Elizabeth made the same petition for the heavenly Lady to bless her in return, and not desiring to deny her this consolation most holy Mary gave it.

309. The Queen visited also the child John, received him in her arms, and bestowed upon him many efficacious and mysterious blessings. The miraculous infant by divine dispensation spoke to the Virgin, although in a low and infantile voice: "Thou art the Mother of God himself, the Queen of all creation, the Depositary of the inestimable Treasure of heaven, my help and protection. Grant me, thy servant, thy blessing, and may thy intercession and thy grace never fail me." Three times he kissed the hand of the Queen of heaven; likewise he adored the incarnate Word in her virginal womb, and asked Him for his benediction and grace. The infant God manifested his pleasure and benevolence toward his Precursor, while the most happy Mother Mary beheld and understood all that was passing. In all things She acted with the plenitude of divine science, venerating all these mysteries according to their proper import, for She responded with a magnanimous Heart to all the works of his divine wisdom (II Mach. 2:9).

310. The whole household of Zacharias had been sanctified by the presence of most holy Mary and of the incarnate Word in her womb; all its inhabitants had been edified by her example,

instructed by her conversations and teachings, and sweetly affected by her conversation and modest behavior. While She had drawn toward Herself all the hearts of that happy family, She also merited and obtained for them from her most holy Son the plenitude of celestial gifts. Her holy spouse Joseph was held in high veneration by Zacharias, Elizabeth and John, for they had come to know his high dignity before he himself was aware of it. The blessed Patriarch, happy in his Treasure, the full value of which he did not yet know, took leave of all and departed for Nazareth. What happened on the way I shall narrate in the following chapter; but before they began their journey most holy Mary, on bended knees, besought St. Joseph to bless Her as She was accustomed to do on such occasions, and after She had received his blessing they went on their journey.

INSTRUCTION OF THE QUEEN, MARY MOST HOLY.

311. My daughter, the happy souls whom God has chosen for his intimate friendship and perfection must keep themselves in continual readiness and peace in order to perform without hesitation or delay all His Majesty may ordain. That is what I did when the Most High commanded me to journey from my house and leave my beloved retreat in order to visit my servant Elizabeth, and likewise when He ordered me to return. I obeyed in all these things with joyful alacrity, and though I had received so many benefits from Elizabeth and her family, and so many tokens of love and friendship as thou hast seen, yet knowing the will of the Lord I set aside all obligation and my own inclination and followed them only so far as was strictly demanded by charity and compassion, and insofar as the most prompt obedience to the divine command permitted.

312. My dearest daughter, how thou must hasten to procure this true and perfect resignation when thou dost fully know its value, how pleasing it is in the eyes of the Lord, and how profitable for thy soul! Labor then to attain it in imitation of me, as I have already so often invited and urged thee. The greatest impediment toward its attainment is to allow particular affections or inclinations toward earthly things, for these make the soul unworthy of the caresses of the Lord and of knowing fully his will; and even if the soul knows his will, the base love of unworthy things will keep him from fulfilling it, for because of his inclinations he will be lacking in the ready and joyful obedience required by the Lord. Take notice of this danger, my daughter, and do not allow any particular affection to enter into thy heart, for I desire thee to be well versed and perfect in this art of divine love, and for thy obedience to be that of an Angel and thy love that of a Seraphim. Thus show thyself in all thy actions, for to this my love urges thee, and this thou art taught by the knowledge and light imparted to thee.

313. I do not say thou must do away with all sensible feeling, for that is not naturally possible to the creature; but whenever thou dost encounter adverse happenings, or when thou art deprived of what is useful, necessary or agreeable, thou must bear it with joyful resignation and give praise to the Lord because his will is being fulfilled concerning thee. By seeking only his pleasure, and considering all else as of passing moment, thou shalt gain a quick and easy victory over thyself, and thou shalt seek all occasions to humble thyself under the mighty hand of the Lord (I Peter 5:6). I also exhort thee to imitate me in my esteem and veneration of the priests, and to always ask their blessing before speaking to them and in leaving them. Do this also in regard to the Most High before beginning any work. Toward thy superiors always show thyself devoted and submissive. If any married women come to seek thy advice exhort them to be obedient to their husbands (Titus 2:5), peacefully subjecting themselves, living retired in their

homes, and carefully fulfilling their obligations toward their families. Tell them not to give themselves up entirely to their occupations, nor to lose themselves in their daily cares on the pretext of necessity, for much more must be trusted to the goodness and generosity of God than to one's own immoderate bustle and activity. In whatever happened to me in my condition thou shalt find true instruction and example, and my whole life shall be an example of perfection for the guidance of souls in all states of life; hence I need not give thee advice for each one.