

CHAPTER XXI

St. Elizabeth Asks the Queen of Heaven to Assist at Her Childbirth, and is Enlightened Regarding the Birth of St. John.

261. Already two months had passed since the coming of the Princess of heaven into the house of St. Elizabeth, and the discreet matron was even now filled with grief at the thought of the departure and absence of the great Lady of the world. She dreaded the loss of such a great blessing as her presence was, and with reason, since she knew it could not come within the range of human merits. In her holy humility she scrutinized her heart, fearing lest any fault of hers might be the cause of the setting of that beautiful moon and of the Sun of justice within the virginal womb. Sometimes she wept and sighed in private because she could find no means of prolonging their stay which had shed so much clear light of grace in her soul. She asked the Lord with many tears to inspire her cousin and Lady, most holy Mary, not to forsake her, or at least not to withdraw so soon her sweet company. She served Her with great reverence and solicitude, and studied to oblige Her. It is no wonder that so saintly, attentive and prudent a woman would ask for that which even the angels coveted, for in addition to the divine light which she had received from the Holy Ghost concerning the supreme dignity and sanctity of the Virgin Mother, she had the personal experience of her most sweet and divine conversation, and all this combined had ravished her heart, and thus without divine aid she could not have survived the parting after once having known and conversed with Her.

262. In order to find some consolation St. Elizabeth resolved to open her heart to the heavenly Lady, who was, however, not ignorant of her sorrow, and she said to Her in great submission and humility: “My cousin and Lady, due to the respect and consideration with which I am bound to serve Thee I have not until now dared to manifest to Thee my desire and a sorrow which has taken possession of my heart. Give me permission to seek alleviation by manifesting to Thee my apprehensions to which I refer, since I only live by the hope of what I desire. The Lord by his divine condescension has shown me the singular mercy of bringing Thee here so I could have this happiness, which I could not merit, of conversing with Thee and knowing the mysteries which divine Providence has enclosed in Thee, my Lady. I am unworthy to praise Him eternally for this benefit (Dan. 3:53). Thou art the living temple of the glory of the Most High, the Ark of the Testament (Heb. 9:4), containing the Manna by which the angels live (Ps. 77:25). Thou art the tablets of the true law, written with the very being of God (Ex. 31:18). I bear in mind my lowliness, and how rich His Majesty made me in one instant, finding myself, without my merit, with the Treasure of heaven in my own house, and with Thee whom He has chosen among women as his Mother. With reason do I fear I have already disobliged Thee and the fruit of thy womb by my sins, and hence Thou shalt both desert this poor slave, leaving me alone and bereft of such a great benefit which I now enjoy. Perhaps, if it be for the service of the Lord and according to thy will, I might obtain the happiness of serving Thee and not separating from Thee for the rest of my life. If returning to thy house entails too much difficulty, more easy would it be to remain in mine,* and call thy holy spouse Joseph in order to live with him here as my masters whom I shall serve as a slave with the affection which moves my desire. Though I do not merit

* cf. Mt. 17:4 [Ed.]

what I ask, I beseech Thee not to despise my humble petition, since the Most High can exceed by his favors my merits and desires.”

263. Most holy Mary heard with sweetest kindness the petition of her cousin Elizabeth and answered her: “Dearest friend of my soul, thy pious and holy affections are acceptable to the Most High, and thy desires agreeable in his eyes. I also thank thee from my heart. Yet in all our concerns and proposals it is our duty to turn toward the divine will and subordinate ourselves to it with entire subjection of our own will. And although this is the obligation of all born into this world, thou well knowest, my friend, that I owe this subjection more than all others, since by the power of his arm (Lk. 1:51) He has raised me from the dust, and with immense kindness has looked upon my lowliness. All my words and movements must be governed by the will of my Lord and Son; I must not have any desire or avoidance except by his divine disposition. Let us present to His Majesty thy desires, and that which He ordains according to his greater pleasure let us execute. I also must obey my spouse Joseph (Eph. 5:22), and without his order and disposition I cannot, my dearest, choose my occupations or my dwelling place. It is reasonable for us to obey the heads of our families and our superiors.”

264. To such efficacious reasonings of the Princess of heaven St. Elizabeth subjected her judgment and desires, and with humble submission said: “My Lady, I desire to obey thy will and revere thy teaching. I only desire to represent to Thee anew the inmost love of my heart submissive in thy service. If the desires I have proposed cannot be fulfilled, and are not conformable to the will of God, I desire at least, if possible, my Queen, for Thee not to forsake me until my son issues forth to the light, so just as within my womb he has recognized and adored his Redeemer in thine he may rejoice in his divine presence and light before any other creature, and receive thy blessing for the first advances in his life in the presence of Him who is to direct his steps uprightly (Prov. 16:9). And Thou, who art the Mother of Grace, may present him to his Creator, and may obtain from his immense goodness the perseverance in that grace which he received by means of thy most sweet voice, when without my merit it sounded in my ears. Then permit me, my Refuge, to behold my child in thy arms upon which God himself is to recline, He who created and formed heaven and earth (Is. 42:5), and preserves them by his command. Let not the greatness of thy maternal kindness be constrained or constricted by my sins, nor deny me this consolation and my son this great happiness, which as a mother I solicit and desire for him without meriting it.”

265. Most holy Mary did not desire to refuse this last petition of her holy cousin, and offered to pray to the Lord for the fulfillment of her desire; She requested her to likewise pray for this so they could know his most holy will. Accordingly the two mothers of the two greatest sons born into the world went to the oratory of the heavenly Princess and presented their petitions to the Most High. Most pure Mary was rapt into an ecstasy in which by new divine light She knew the mystery, life and merits of the Precursor St. John and his work in preparing by his preaching the ways of human hearts in order to receive their Redeemer and Teacher (Mt. 3:3; Mk. 1:3; Lk. 3:4; Jn. 1:23). Regarding these great sacraments She manifested to St. Elizabeth only those which she could properly understand. She was also informed of the great sanctity of St. Elizabeth herself, and that her death would occur shortly and after that of Zacharias. The kind Mother lovingly besought the Lord to assist her at her death and fulfill her desires in regard to her son. Regarding the other fond desires the most prudent Virgin made no request, for in her heavenly wisdom She immediately knew that to live always in the house of her cousin was not advisable or according to the will of the Most High.

266. To these petitions His Majesty responded: “My Spouse and my Dove, it is my pleasure for Thee to assist and console my servant Elizabeth, being present at her childbirth, which is to be very soon, for there are only eight days left before this event. After her son whom she shall bear has been circumcised, Thou shalt return to thy home with Joseph thy spouse. After his birth Thou shalt present to Me my servant John, which shall be for Me an acceptable sacrifice; and persevere, my Friend, in beseeching Me for the eternal salvation of souls.” At the same time St. Elizabeth united her prayers with those of the Queen of heaven and earth, supplicating the Lord that He might command his Mother and Spouse not to forsake her in her childbirth. During this prayer the Lord revealed to her this was already very near, and other things of great relief and consolation in her cares.

267. Most holy Mary issued from her rapture, and having finished their prayer the two mothers conferred upon the nearness of the childbirth of St. Elizabeth as made known to them by the Lord; and then with ardent desire of her good fortune the holy matron asked our Queen: “My Lady, tell me, I beseech Thee, whether I am worthy of the good for which I asked Thee, to have Thee with me on the occasion of my parturition, which is already so near?” Her Majesty answered: “My friend and cousin, the Most High has heard and accepted our prayers, and has deigned to command me to fulfill thy desire and serve thee on this occasion. This I shall do, remaining not only until thy parturition, but also until thy infant shall be circumcised according to the law, which shall take place in fifteen days.” At this resolve of most holy Mary the joy of her cousin was renewed, and she acknowledged this great favor in humble gratitude to the Lord and to the holy Queen. Thus rejoiced and enlivened by mutual conferences the holy matron began to prepare for the birth of her son and for the departure of her sovereign cousin.

*INSTRUCTION GIVEN TO ME BY THE HEAVENLY QUEEN
AND OUR LADY, MARY MOST HOLY.*

268. My daughter, when the desire of the creature arises from pious affection and devotion, and is directed with an upright intention toward holy ends, the Most High is not displeased that it is proposed to Him, if it is done with submission to his greater pleasure and with resignation, in order to carry out what his divine Providence will arrange for all. When souls place themselves in the presence of the Lord with this conformity and spiritual disposition, He looks upon them as a kind Father (Ps. 33:16), and always grants them what is just, and denies them and diverts from them what is unjust, or is not conducive to their true welfare. The desire of my cousin Elizabeth to accompany me all her life and not depart from me arose from good and pious zeal; yet this was not proper according to the determination of the Most High, who had arranged all the undertakings, travels and events which awaited me. And though He denied her this petition He was not displeased by it, but granted her whatever would not hinder the decrees of his holy will and infinite wisdom, and would result in her benefit and that of her son John. By the love which the mother and son had for me, and through my intercession, the Almighty enriched them with great benefits and favors. The most efficacious means of obtaining such benefits from the Most High is to ask Him with good will and intention by means of my intercession and devotion to me.

269. I desire thee to offer all thy petitions and prayers in the name of my most holy Son and my own, and trust without fear they shall be admitted if they are offered with the most upright intention of pleasing God. Look upon me with loving affection as thy Mother, thy protector, and thy refuge, and entrust thyself to my devotion and love. And be aware, my dearest, that the desire

I have for thy greater good obliges me to instruct thee in the most powerful and efficacious means by which, with divine grace, thou mayest obtain great treasures and benefits from the most liberal hand of the Lord. Do not make thyself unfit for them, nor hinder them by thy fearful reticence. And if thou dost desire to induce me to love thee as my much beloved daughter, be diligent in imitating what I manifest and teach thee regarding my actions; in this employ thy strength and sollicitude, considering as time well employed any labors undergone to achieve the effect of my teaching and doctrine.