

CHAPTER III

The Angel of the Lord Speaks to St. Joseph in Sleep and Declares to Him the Mystery of the Incarnation; the Effects This Message had on Him.

397. The sorrow of jealousy is such a vigilant alarm that it not only repeatedly awakens those afflicted by it, but often drives away altogether the quiet of repose and sleep. Nobody ever suffered this sorrow in the same degree as St. Joseph, though if he had known the truth nobody ever had less occasion. He was endowed with great knowledge and light in order to penetrate and see the inestimable sanctity and qualities of his heavenly Spouse. Encountering in her pregnancy the reasons which obliged him to relinquish the possession of such great good, it was unavoidable that the knowledge of what he was losing added to the sorrow of departing from Her (Eccles. 1:18). Hence what St. Joseph suffered in this regard exceeds all that ever was endured by any man, for no one ever equaled him in the loss, and no one could so value and estimate it; moreover, there was a great difference in the zeal and jealousy of this faithful servant of God and the jealousies of others in like troubles. Jealousies add to vehement and fervent love a great care to preserve and not lose the one loved, and to this emotion there follows by natural necessity the pain of losing the loved one and imagining anyone could remove the loved one. This pain or malady is commonly called jealousy. In those who have disorderly passions, and who for lack of prudence or other virtues yield to them, it usually causes the different feelings of wrath, fury and envy toward the person loved, or against the rival who impedes the return of love, be it a well-ordered love or not. Storms of suspicion and conjecture, engendered by these passions, then arise in the imagination, with tempests of alternate desire and abhorrence, of loving affection and vain regret. Thus the irascible and concupiscible faculties are in perpetual strife, without any regard for the demands of reason or prudence, for this kind of sorrow confounds the understanding, perverts the reason, and rejects prudence.

398. But St. Joseph did not have these depraved disorders, nor could they find room in him due to his own exalted sanctity and that of his Spouse, for in Her he could find no fault to exasperate him, nor had he any suspicion her love had been captured by anyone else against whom or toward whom his envy might be aroused in defense. The jealousy of St. Joseph was founded entirely upon his own great love for Her and in a certain conditional doubt or suspicion lest his Spouse had not entirely responded to his own love, for he found no such strong reasons against as he did for his mistrust. A greater uncertainty was not necessary in his case in order to cause such vehement sorrows, for in the possession of a spouse no rival can be tolerated. Hence the vehement and chaste love of the Saint, which filled his whole heart, was sufficient to cause in him the most vehement grief at the least appearance of infidelity or danger of losing this most perfect, beautiful and delightful object of all his desires and thoughts; for if love is in possession of such just motives, strong and unbreakable are the bonds and chains with which it captivates the heart, and most powerful is the dominion which it exercises, especially when there are no imperfections to weaken it. Our Queen had nothing either in the spiritual or natural order which could moderate and temper the love of her holy spouse, but rather that which would foment it by repeated titles and causes.

399. Full of this sorrow, which had now become an intolerable pain, St. Joseph, after saying the prayer mentioned above, composed himself for a short sleep, assured that he would wake up at the right time to leave his home at midnight and without the knowledge of his Spouse (or so he thought). The heavenly Lady awaited the intervention of God, asking it of Him in most humble

prayer, for She knew the tribulation of her troubled spouse had reached such a high point that the time of the merciful assistance of God must have arrived. The Most High sent St. Gabriel the Archangel to where St. Joseph was sleeping to manifest to him by divine revelation the mystery of the pregnancy of Mary his Spouse; and the Archangel, carrying out this legation, went to St. Joseph and spoke to him in his sleep, as St. Matthew said (1:20-23), and declared all the mystery of the Incarnation and Redemption in the words recorded by the Evangelist. It might cause some wonder (and such was caused in me) why the holy Archangel spoke to St. Joseph in his sleep and not while awake, since the mystery was so high and so difficult to comprehend, especially in the present afflicted and troubled state of his mind, while this same mystery was made known to others not while they were asleep but awake.

400. In these operations, of course, the ultimate reason is always the divine will itself, just, holy and perfect. However, as far as I have understood, I shall partly mention some other reasons in explanation. The first reason is that St. Joseph was so prudent, filled with such heavenly light, and had such a high conception of our Lady, most holy Mary, that it was not necessary to convince him by strong evidence in order to assure him of her dignity and the mysteries of the Incarnation, for in well-disposed hearts the divine inspirations find easy entrance. The second reason is his trouble had its beginning in the senses, namely in seeing with his eyes the pregnancy of his Spouse; hence it was a just retribution for them, having given occasion for deception or suspicion, to be as it were deadened or repressed by the privation of the angelic vision. The third reason is as it were a sequence of this last one: St. Joseph, though he was guilty of no fault, was under the influence of his affliction, and his senses were so to say deadened and incapacitated for the vision and sensible communication of the holy Archangel; hence it was appropriate for the Archangel Gabriel to deliver this message to him at a time when the senses, which had been scandalized, were inactive and suspended in their operations. Thus the holy man could afterwards, regaining their full use, purify and dispose himself by many acts of virtue for receiving the influx of the Holy Ghost, which had been entirely interrupted by his troubles.

401. Thus shall also be understood why God spoke to the ancient Fathers more often during sleep than happens to the faithful ones of the evangelical law, for in the new law revelation in sleep is less frequent than direct communication with the angels, which provides a more efficient mode of communication. The explanation of this fact is this: Since according to the divine disposition the greatest impediment and obstacle to a more familiar treatment and conversation of souls with God and his angels is the commission of sins, even venial sins or only imperfections, it follows that after the divine Word became man and conversed with mortals the senses and all our faculties are purified day by day by the sanctifying use of sensible Sacraments by which men in some degree are spiritualized and elevated, and their sluggish faculties aroused and made apt for participation in the divine influences. This blessing we owe more than the ancients to the blood of Christ our Lord, by whose virtue we are sanctified through the Sacraments, receiving in them divine effects of special graces, and in some of them even a spiritual character which destines and prepares us for most high ends. Yet whenever the Lord in our times spoke or speaks in sleep, He excludes the operations of the senses as being unfit and unprepared to enter into the spiritual nuptials of his communications and divine influences.

402. It will also appear from this doctrine that in order to receive the hidden favor of the Lord men must not only be free from guilt and possess merits and grace, but also be in peace and tranquility of spirit, for if the republic of the faculties is in disturbance (as it was in St. Joseph) the soul is not in a fit condition to receive such exalted and delicate influences as are implied by the visits and caresses of the Lord. It is not at all uncommon that no matter how much

tribulations and afflictions increase the merits of the soul (as were those of St. Joseph, the spouse of the Queen), they nevertheless hinder the divine operations, for in suffering them the soul is involved in a conflict with the powers of darkness, while this kind of blessing consists in the possession of light and is incompatible with the vision of darkness, even if only to banish it. But in the midst of the conflict and the battle of temptations, which may be compared to a dream in the night, the voice of the Lord is nevertheless accustomed to be heard and perceived through the ministry of the angels, just as it happened to St. Joseph. He heard and understood all St. Gabriel said, that he should not be afraid to remain with Mary his Spouse (Mt. 1:20-21), because He whom She bore in her womb was the work of the Holy Ghost; that She would give birth to a Son who would be called Jesus, and who was to be the Savior of his people; and in all this would be fulfilled the prophecy of Isaias, who said (Is. 7:14): *A Virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel, which signifies God with us.* St. Joseph did not see the Angel by imaginary image; he only heard the interior voice and understood the mystery. From the words which the holy Archangel spoke it follows that St. Joseph had already determined to leave most holy Mary, for he was commanded to receive Her again without fear.

403. St. Joseph awoke with the full consciousness that his Spouse was the true Mother of God. Full of joy due to his good fortune and inconceivable happiness, and at the same time deeply moved by sudden sorrow for what he had done, he prostrated himself to the earth and with many other humble, reverential and joyful tokens of his feelings he performed heroic acts of humility and gratitude. He gave thanks to the Lord for having revealed to him this mystery, and for having made him spouse of Her Majesty, whom God had chosen for his Mother, though he was unworthy to be even her slave. Amid these recognitions and acts of virtue the spirit of St. Joseph remained tranquil and fit for the reception of new influences of the Holy Ghost. By the doubt and trepidation he had gone through were laid in him those very deep foundations of humility which were necessary for one who would be entrusted with the highest mysteries of the Lord, and the remembrance of his experiences was to him a lesson which lasted all his life. The holy man began to blame himself alone for all that had happened, and he broke forth in the following prayer: “O my heavenly Spouse and meekest Dove, chosen by the Most High for his dwelling place and for his Mother, how could thy unworthy slave have dared to doubt thy fidelity? How could dust and ashes ever permit itself to be served by Thee, who art the Queen of heaven and earth and the Mistress of the universe? How is it I have not kissed the ground touched by thy feet? Why have I not made it my most solicitous care to serve Thee on my knees? How shall I ever raise my eyes in thy presence and dare to remain in thy company or open my lips to speak to Thee? O my Lord and God, give me grace and strength to ask her forgiveness, and move her Heart to mercy so She does not despise her sorrowful servant according to his guilt. Ah woe is me! Since She is full of light and grace, and bears within Herself the Author of light, all my thoughts were open to her sight, and also my resolve to actually leave Her; hence it shall be temerity on my part to appear in her presence. I now recognize my rude behavior and my gross error, since even with such great sanctity before my eyes I gave way to unworthy thoughts and doubts concerning her fidelity, which I did not deserve. And if in punishment thy justice had permitted me to execute my presumptuous resolve, what would now be my misfortune? Eternally shall I thank Thee, most high Lord, for such an incomparable blessing! Assist me, most powerful King, to make some kind of reparation. I shall go to my Spouse and Lady, confiding in her sweetness and clemency. Prostrate at her feet I shall ask her pardon so for her sake Thou, my eternal Lord and God, mayest look upon me with the eyes of a Father and mayest pardon my gross error.”

404. The holy spouse now left his little room, finding himself so happily changed in sentiment since the time he had composed himself for sleep. Since the Queen of heaven had always kept Herself in retirement, he did not wish to disturb her sweet contemplation until She herself desired (Cant. 2:7). In the meantime the man of God unwrapped the small bundle which he had prepared, shedding many tears with feelings quite different from those with which he had made it up. Weeping he began to show his reverence for his heavenly Spouse by setting the rooms in order and scrubbing the floors which were to be touched by the sacred feet of most holy Mary. He also performed other chores which he had been accustomed to leave to the heavenly Lady before he knew her dignity. He resolved to change entirely his relation toward Her, applying to himself the office of servant and to Her that of Lady. From that day on arose a wonderful contention between the two regarding which of them should be allowed to show the most eagerness to serve and the most humility. All that happened with St. Joseph the Queen of heaven saw, and not a thought or movement escaped her attention. When the time arrived the Saint approached the oratory of Her Highness, and She awaited him with sweetest kindness and mildness as I shall describe in the following chapter.

INSTRUCTION WHICH THE HEAVENLY LADY, MOST HOLY MARY, GAVE ME.

405. My daughter, in what thou hast understood of this chapter thou hast a sweet motive for praising the wonderful ways of the wisdom of God in afflicting and again consoling his servants and chosen ones; from both the one and the other He most wisely and kindly draws for them increase of merit and glory. In addition to this doctrine I desire thee to receive another one, most important for thy direction and for the narrow pathway which the Most High has assigned to thee. It is this, to strive with all thy might to preserve thyself in tranquility and interior peace, without allowing thyself to be deprived of it by any troublesome event of this life whatsoever, and by always keeping in mind the example and instruction contained in this part of the life of my spouse St. Joseph. The Most High does not wish to see mortals disturbed by afflictions, but rather that they gain merit; not to lose courage, but test their own power when aided by grace. Although the more violent temptations are accustomed to close the haven of exalted peace and knowledge of God, and ground the creature more firmly in the knowledge of its own lowliness, yet if the soul loses its interior tranquility and equilibrium it will make itself unfit for the visit of the Lord, for hearing his voice, and for being raised up to his embraces. His Majesty does not come in a storm cloud (III Kg. 19:12), nor will the rays of this supreme Sun of justice shine when calm is not reigning in the soul.

406. If then the lack of this tranquility so hinders the intimate communication of the Most High, it is clear that sins are a still greater hindrance to this great blessing. I desire thee to be very attentive to this doctrine, and not presume to allow any disregard of it in any operation of thy faculties. Since thou hast so often offended the Lord, call upon his mercy; weep and wash thyself from thy sins with copious tears. Remember thou art obliged, under pain of being condemned as unfaithful, to watch over thy soul and preserve it pure, clean and undisturbed for an eternal resting place of the Almighty, so thy God may possess it and find in it a worthy habitation (I Cor. 3:16). The harmony of thy faculties and feelings is to be like that of the music of soft and delicate instruments, in which the more delicate the harmony so much the greater is the danger of discord, and so much the greater must be the care to preserve the instruments from all gross contact, for even the atmosphere infected by earthly tendencies is sufficient to disturb and spoil the powers of the soul thus consecrated to God. Labor therefore to live a careful life and keep

full command over thy faculties and operations. If at any time thou art disturbed or disconcerted in maintaining this order, strive to attend to the divine light, making use of it without fear or hesitation and working with it whatever is most perfect and pure. In this I point out to thee the example of my spouse St. Joseph, who believed the Angel without a moment's hesitation and immediately with prompt obedience executed his commands, thereby meriting to be raised to great reward and dignity. If he humiliated himself so deeply, without having sinned in what he did, only because for such reasons (though only apparent) he had been so disturbed, how must thou, a mere worm of the earth, acknowledge thy littleness and humble thyself to the dust, weeping over thy negligences and sins so the Most High may look upon thee as a Father and a Spouse.