

CHAPTER II

The Misgivings of St. Joseph Increase; He Resolves to Leave His Spouse, and Prays about This.

388. In the tormenting doubts he was battling, the most upright heart of St. Joseph sometimes prudently tried to find some calm and recover the vigor of his spirit in his severe affliction, reasoning with himself and trying to persuade himself that the pregnancy of his Spouse was as yet doubtful. But this ploy diminished each day with the growth of her virginal womb, which by the passage of time manifested her pregnancy with greater evidence; the glorious Saint found no other cause to which he could attribute it, his effort in this being frustrated and of little constancy. Thus he passed from doubt to forceful certainty as her pregnancy became more apparent. In her advancing pregnancy the heavenly Princess was most gracious and without suspicion of any defects, for in all her ways She perfectly advanced in loveliness, health, agility and beauty; yet in his suspicions all this only bound Her to him in his most chaste love and grief, without being able to separate all of these affections at a time when he was tormented by their various waves. Thus he surrendered to them, being finally convinced of her pregnancy by the totality of the evidence. Although his spirit was always conformed to the will of God, yet his flesh in his weakness felt the excess of his interior trouble, which at last reached such a point that he knew not anymore which way to turn. The strength of his body was broken and vanished away, not by a definite disease, but in weakness and emaciation. The profound sorrow and melancholy which afflicted him became known in his countenance; moreover, since he suffered all this alone without seeking relief or lessening his sorrow by communication with others as is customary with the afflicted, his suffering grew to be so much the more serious and incurable.

389. Not less was the sorrow which penetrated the Heart of most holy Mary; yet though this sorrow was very great, the capacity of her generous and magnanimous soul was much greater, and thus She could conceal her grief more completely and occupy her faculties in the loving care of her spouse St. Joseph. Hence her sorrow only incited Her to attend with so much the greater devotion to his health and comfort; nevertheless, since the inviolable rule of the actions of the most prudent Queen was to perform all in the fullness of wisdom and perfection, She continued to conceal the mystery concerning the disclosure of which She had received no command. Though She alone could relieve her spouse by an explanation, She withheld it in the reverence and faithfulness due to the sacrament of the heavenly King (Tob. 12:7). As far as She herself was concerned She tried to influence him as much as She could. She spoke to him about his health and asked what She could do for his service and to alleviate the ailment which so weakened him. She urged him to take some rest and recreation, since it was a duty to yield to necessity and repair weakened strength in order to be able to work for the Lord afterward. St. Joseph observed all the actions of his heavenly Spouse, and pondering over such virtue and discretion, and feeling the effects of her conversation and presence, he said: "Is it possible that a Woman of such habits, and in whom such graces of the Lord are manifest, can bring over me such affliction? How can this prudence and holiness be compatible with the signs I see of her having been unfaithful to God and to me, who love Her so much? If I resolve to send Her away or to leave Her I shall lose her most loving company, all my comfort, my home and my tranquility. What blessing equal to Her can I find if I withdraw from Her? What consolation, if this one fails? But all this weighs less than the infamy connected with such an unhappy misfortune, and that I would come to be looked upon as her accomplice in any crime. For this event to remain concealed is not possible, since time shall reveal all, even if I strive now to hide it. To pass as the author of this pregnancy

shall be a vile deceit and a blotch on my good name and conscience. I cannot recognize it as caused by me, nor can I ascribe it to any other source known to me. Hence what am I to do in this dire distress? The least evil shall be to absent myself and leave my house before her delivery comes upon Her, for then I would be still more confused and afflicted. I would then be obliged to live in my own house with a child not my own, without being able to find any outlet or expedient.”

390. The Princess of heaven, becoming aware of the resolve of her spouse St. Joseph to leave Her and absent himself, turned in great sorrow to her holy Angels and said to them: “Blessed spirits and ministers of the highest King, who raised thee to the felicity which ye enjoy, and by his condescension accompany me as his faithful servants and my guardians, I beseech thee, my friends, to present before the clemency of God the afflictions of my spouse Joseph. Beseech Him to look upon him and console him as the true God and Father. And ye, who are so punctually obedient to his words, hear also my petitions. By Him who, being infinite, desired to become incarnate in my womb, I beseech, petition and supplicate thee that without delay ye hasten to assist the most faithful heart of my spouse in his predicament, relieving his affliction and taking away from his mind and heart his resolve of leaving me.” The Angels who the Queen selected for this purpose obeyed immediately and instilled into the heart of St. Joseph many holy thoughts, persuading him anew that Mary his Spouse was holy and most perfect, and that he could not believe anything wrong of Her; that God was incomprehensible in his works, and most hidden in his judgments; that He was always most faithful to those who confide in Him (Lam. 3:25); and that He would never despise or forsake them in tribulation (Ps. 33:19).

391. By these and other holy inspirations the troubled spirit of St. Joseph was somewhat quieted, although he did not know from whence they came. But as the cause of his sorrow was not removed he soon relapsed, not finding anything to assure and soothe his soul, and he returned to his resolve of withdrawing and leaving his Spouse. The heavenly Queen was aware of this, and She concluded it was necessary to avert this danger and insist in earnest prayer on a remedy. Turning her attention entirely to her most holy Son whom She contained in her womb, with the most ardent affection of her soul She prayed: “Lord and God of my soul, with thy permission, though I am but dust and ashes (Gen. 18:27), I shall speak in thy kingly presence and manifest to Thee my sighs which cannot be hidden from Thee (Ps. 37:10). It is my duty not to be remiss in assisting the spouse whom I have received from thy hand. I see him overwhelmed by the tribulation which Thou hast sent him, and it would not be kind for me to forsake him therein. If I have found grace in thine eyes (Ex. 34:9), I beseech Thee, Lord and eternal God, by the love which obliged Thee to enter into the womb of thy servant for the remedy of men (I Jn. 4:9), to be pleased to console thy servant Joseph and dispose him to assist me in the fulfillment of thy great works. It would not be good for thy slave be left without a spouse to serve Thee as my protector, patron and guardian. Do not permit him, my Lord and God, to execute his resolve and withdraw from me.”

392. The Most High answered Her: “My dearest Dove, I shall presently visit my servant Joseph with consolation, and after I shall have manifested to him by my Angel the sacrament which is unknown to him Thou mayest speak openly about all I have done with Thee, without the necessity of keeping silent thenceforward in these matters. I shall fill him with my spirit and make him apt to perform his share in these mysteries. He shall assist Thee in them and aid Thee in all that shall happen.” With this promise of the Lord most holy Mary was comforted and consoled, and She gave most fervent thanks to the same Lord, who disposes all things in admirable order, measure and weight (Wis. 11:21); for besides the consolation it gave to the

great Lady, relieving Her of this concern, She also knew well how advantageous it was for the spirit of St. Joseph to be tried and dilated by this tribulation for the great affairs to be entrusted to him.

393. At the same time St. Joseph was conferring within himself concerning his doubts, two months having already passed in this great tribulation; and overcome by this difficulty he said: “I do not find a better way out of these difficulties than to absent myself. I confess my Spouse is most perfect and exhibits nothing but what shows Her a saint; but after all She is pregnant, and of it I cannot fathom the mystery. I do not desire to injure her reputation of holiness by involving Her in the punishment of the law, yet at the same time I cannot stand by and witness the consequences of her pregnancy. I shall now leave Her and commit myself to the providence of the Lord who governs me.” He then resolved to depart during that night, and in order to prepare for his journey he packed some clothes and other trifles into a small bundle. Having also claimed some wages due to him for his work, he retired to rest with the intention of leaving at midnight. Yet due to the remarkable nature of this undertaking, and because he was in the habit of commending his intentions to God in prayer, after he had come to this resolve he spoke to the Lord: “Highest and eternal God of our fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Thou true and only refuge of the poor and afflicted, the grief and tribulation of my heart are well known to thy clemency. As well, O Lord, Thou knowest (although I am unworthy) I am innocent of that which causes my sorrow, and Thou likewise art aware of the infamy and danger consequent upon the condition of my Spouse. I do not believe Her an adulteress because I see in Her great virtue and perfection; yet I certainly see Her pregnant. I do not know by whom or how it was caused, and therefore I find no way to restore my peace. In order to choose the least evil I shall withdraw from Her and seek a place where no one knows me, and resigning myself to thy providence I shall pass my life in a desert. Do not forsake me, my Lord and eternal God, since I desire solely thy honor and service.”

394. St. Joseph prostrated himself on the ground and made a vow to go to the temple of Jerusalem and offer up a part of the small sum of money which he had provided for his journey so God would help and protect Mary his Spouse from the calamities of men and free Her from all misfortune, for great was the uprightness of this man of God and the esteem in which he held the heavenly Lady. After this prayer he composed himself for a short sleep with the intention of departing in secret at midnight from his Spouse. During this sleep, however, happened what I shall relate in the next chapter. The great Princess of heaven (assured by the divine promise) observed from her retirement all that St. Joseph was preparing to do, for the Almighty showed it to Her. Hearing the vow which he made for her welfare, and seeing the small bundle and the poor provision he prepared for his journey, She was filled with tenderness and compassion, praying anew for him with thanksgiving, praising the Lord in his works and for the order with which He disposes them above all the thoughts of men. His Majesty so ordained events that both most holy Mary and St. Joseph were brought to the utmost reach of interior sorrow, for besides the merits of this prolonged martyrdom they would gain the admirable and precious blessing of the divine consolation deserved thereby. Although the great Lady persevered in the belief and hope of a seasonable intervention of the Lord, and therefore remained silent in order not to reveal the sacrament concerning the disclosure of which the King had given Her no command (Tob. 12:7), yet She was much afflicted by the resolve of St. Joseph to leave Her, because She reflected upon the great inconvenience of being alone and without a companion and protector upon whom She could rely for consolation and support in the natural order, for She well knew She could not expect all to proceed according to the supernatural and miraculous. Yet all her sighs could not

prevent Her from exercising the most exalted virtues with a magnanimous spirit, such as patience in bearing her afflictions and the suspicions of St. Joseph and its results, prudence in withholding the disclosure of the mystery due to its grandeur, silence in signaling Herself as a woman who knows how to refrain from speaking about that which so many human reasons urged Her to make known, and forbearance and humility in silently submitting to the suspicions of St. Joseph. She exercised many other virtues in a wonderful manner in this difficulty, by which She taught us to hope in the Almighty for our deliverance in the greatest tribulations.

INSTRUCTION GIVEN ME BY THE QUEEN OF HEAVEN, MARY MOST HOLY.

395. My daughter, the example of my silence about which thou hast been writing should teach thee to use it as a guide in thy treatment of the favors and sacraments of the Lord, namely to keep them concealed within thy heart. Although it might at times seem useful to reveal them for the consolation of some soul, thou must not act upon this opinion without having first consulted God in prayer and then thy superiors, for these spiritual matters must not be made dependent upon human feeling which is so much subject to the passions and inclinations of nature. There is always great danger of considering that to be an advantage which is harmful, and a service to God what is injurious. It is not given to the eyes of flesh and blood (I Cor. 2:14) to discern the interior movements so as to decide which of them are divine and caused by grace, or which are human and engendered by the disorderly affections. Although there is a great difference between these two kinds of affections and their causes, nevertheless if the creature is not highly enlightened and dead to his passions he cannot recognize this difference, nor separate the precious from the vile (Jer. 15:19). This danger is greater when some temporal or human motive is mixed up with or underlies our actions, for then our natural self-love is accustomed to creep in and take away discretion and supervision of heavenly and spiritual things, leading many to sudden and dangerous falls.

396. Let it therefore be to thee as a rule always to be followed to reveal nothing to anyone except to thy spiritual guide unless I command otherwise. Since I have constituted myself thy Teacher, I shall not fail to give thee advice and direction in this and in all other things, lest thou stray from the path appointed to thee by the will of my most holy Son. Moreover I admonish thee to appreciate highly all the favors and revelations of the Most High; preserve them with a magnanimous heart, esteem them, give thanks for them, and put them into practice in preference to anything else, especially in preference to anything originating from thy own inclinations. The reverential fear of God bound me to silence, having (as was proper) such a high regard for the Treasure deposited in me. Notwithstanding the natural feeling of love and obligation toward my master and spouse St. Joseph, and in disregard of the sorrow and compassion for his afflictions from which I so desired to free him, I hid the secret of my state in silence, preferring the pleasure of the Lord to all these considerations, and leaving to Him the defense of my cause. Learn also from this never to defend thyself against accusations, no matter how innocent thou mayest be; oblige the Lord to do it by confiding in his love. Charge thy reputation to his account, and in the meanwhile overcome by patience and humility, by sweet and kind words, those who have offended thee. Above all things I admonish thee never to judge evil of anyone, even if thou dost see with thy own eyes the indications which move thee, for perfect and sincere charity shall teach thee to find a prudent evasion and excuse for all the faults of thy neighbor. For this God has placed as an example my spouse St. Joseph, since no one ever had more evident proofs of evil, and yet no one was more discreet in deferring his judgment; for in the law of discreet and

holy charity it must be held as prudence, not temerity, to suspect higher causes, as yet unseen, rather than to judge and condemn our neighbors for faults in which his guilt is not clearly evident. I do not give thee special instructions for those who are in the state of matrimony, since they can derive them manifestly from the whole course of my life. But from the above instruction all can profit, though just now I have in view thy own advancement because I desire it with special love. Hear me, daughter, and fulfill my counsels and follow these my words of eternal life.