

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 tribulation? How can this prudence and holiness be compatible with the signs I see of her having been unfaithful to God and to me, who from the heart love Her so much? If I resolve to release Her or move away I shall lose her most loving company, all my consolation, my home and my quietude. What blessing like Her can I find if I withdraw from Her? What consolation, if this one fails? Yet all this weighs less than the infamy connected with such an unhappy misfortune, and that I would come to be looked upon as being an accomplice in any crime. For this event to remain concealed is not possible, since time shall manifest all, even if I strive now to hide it. To pass as the author

of this pregnancy would be a vile lie against my own conscience and reputation. I cannot recognize it as caused by me, nor attribute to it a cause of which I am ignorant. Hence what am I to do in this predicament? The least evil shall be to absent myself and leave my house before her delivery comes upon Her, which would only bring upon me more confusion and affliction without knowing what counsel to take and determination to make, seeing in my house a child not my own.”

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 supreme King, who raised thee to the happiness which ye enjoy, and by his condescension accompany me as his most faithful servants and my sentinels, I beseech thee, my friends, to present to his clemency the afflictions of my spouse Joseph. Beseech Him to look upon him and console him as a Father and the true God. And ye, who are so punctually obedient to his words, hear also my petitions. By Him who being infinite desired to enclose Himself in my womb* I beseech, petition and supplicate thee that without delay ye hasten to assist the most just heart of my spouse in his predicament, alleviating him in his sorrows and driving from his mind and soul the determination he has made to leave 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. Yet since 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 highest Good of my soul, if Thou givest permission, though I am dust and ashes (Gen. 18:27), I shall speak in thy royal presence and manifest to Thee my groans which cannot be hidden from Thee (Ps. 37:10). It is just, my Master, not to be remiss in assisting the spouse whom I have received from thy hand. I see him in the tribulation in which Thou hast placed him by thy providence, and it would not be kind for me to leave 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 slave for the remedy of men (I Jn. 4:9), to be pleased to console thy servant Joseph and dispose him to help 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 Dove and my Friend, I shall turn toward my servant Joseph with alacrity and console him, and after declaring to him by means of my Angel the sacrament which is unknown to him, Thou mayest speak with clarity about all I have done with Thee without continuing thy silence in this matter. I shall fill him with my spirit and make him capable of what he must do in these mysteries. He shall help Thee in them and assist Thee in all

* cf. *Alleluia v.*, Feast of the Divine Maternity (Oct. 11): *Virgo Dei Genitrix, quem totus non capit orbis, in tua se clausit viscera factus homo.* [Ed.]

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 more opportune means to alleviate my sorrow than to absent myself. I confess my Spouse is most perfect, and nothing do I see in Her which does not give testimony of her holiness; but after all She is pregnant, and of it I cannot fathom the mystery. I do not desire to injure her reputation of virtue by delivering Her to the punishment of the law, yet at the same time I cannot simply await the consequences of her pregnancy. I shall now leave Her and resign 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: “Most high and eternal God of our fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Thou true and only refuge of the poor and afflicted, the sorrow and tribulation which have taken possession of my heart are well known to thy clemency. Thou also knowest, O Lord, though I am unworthy, my innocence regarding the cause of my pain, and the infamy and danger which threaten me due to the condition of my Spouse. I do not consider Her an adulteress because I recognize in Her great virtues and perfection; yet with certainty I see Her pregnant. I do not know the cause or the manner of this happening, and therefore I find no way to restore my peace. In order to do the least harm I shall move away from Her to a place where no one knows me, and resigning myself to thy providence I shall live out my life in a desert. Do not forsake me, my Lord and eternal God, since I desire only 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 calumnies of men and free Her from all evil, so 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 accumulated by this prolonged martyrdom they would obtain the admirable and precious benefit of the divine consolation. 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), nevertheless She was much afflicted by the resolve of St. Joseph to leave Her; 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 this distress 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 instruction I give thee by the example of my silence of which thou hast written 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 in order to decide which of them are divine and caused by grace, or which are human and engendered by 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 benefits of the Most High; treat them with magnanimity, and prefer them in thy estimation, thanksgiving, and execution of all inferior matters, especially those of thy own inclination. The reverential fear I had greatly obliged me to silence, judging as so admirable (as was my duty) 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 concealed the secret of my state in silence, preferring the pleasure of the Lord to all these considerations, and leaving to Him the cause which He reserved to Himself alone. 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 neighbor 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.