

CHAPTER IX

The Journey of Most Holy Mary from Nazareth to Bethlehem in the Company of Her Holy Spouse Joseph and the Angels who Assisted.

456. Most pure Mary and glorious St. Joseph departed from Nazareth for Bethlehem alone, poor and humble in the eyes of the world. None of the mortals thought more of them than what was warranted by their poverty and humility. But O the admirable sacraments of the Most High, hidden to the proud and inscrutable to carnal prudence! They did not walk alone, poor or despised, but prosperous, rich, and in magnificence. They were most worthy of the immense love of the eternal Father and most estimable in his eyes. They carried with them the Treasure of heaven and the very Divinity; the whole court of celestial ministers venerated them; and all the inanimate beings recognized the living and true Ark of the Testament more readily than the waters of the Jordan recognized its type and shadow when they courteously laid open and free the path for its passage and for those who followed it (Josue 3:16). They were accompanied by the ten thousand Angels who as I said above (450) were appointed by God himself as the servants of Her Majesty during that whole journey. These celestial squadrons escorting Her were in human form visible to the heavenly Lady, each one more resplendent than many suns. She herself walked in their midst better guarded and defended than the bed of Solomon surrounded by the sixty valiant ones of Israel girded with their swords (Cant. 3:7-8). Besides these ten thousand Angels there were many others who descended from heaven as envoys of the eternal Father to his Onlybegotten made man and to his most holy Mother, and from them they returned with the messages which they dispatched.

457. In the midst of this royal retinue, hidden from the gaze of men, most holy Mary and Joseph proceeded on their way, secure that their feet would not be bruised by the stone of tribulation (Ps. 90:12) because the Lord had commanded his Angels to bear them in their hands as their defense and custody. This command the most faithful ministers, as vassals of their great Queen, fulfilled with wonder and delight, seeing centered in a mere creature such great sacraments together with such perfections, grandeur and treasures of the Divinity, all this with a dignity and decorum which exceeded even their own angelic capacity. They composed new canticles in honor of the Lord whom they saw reclining as the highest King of glory on his throne of gold (Cant. 3:10), and in honor of the divine Mother, who was like his living and incorruptible chariot (Ib. 9), or the fertile ear of corn of the promised land (Lv. 23:10) enclosing the living grain, or the rich merchant ship which brings the grain to the house of bread,* that dying in the earth it can be multiplied for heaven (Jn. 12:24-5). Their journey lasted five days, for due to her pregnancy St. Joseph shortened each day's journey. The sovereign Queen experienced no darkness of night on the way, for a few times when their travel extended beyond nightfall the holy Angels spread about such effulgence as not all the lights of heaven in their noon-tide splendor would have beamed forth in the clearest heavens. This light and vision of the Angels St. Joseph also enjoyed at those times. Then all of them together would form celestial choirs in which the great Lady and her spouse alternated with the supernal spirits in admirable canticles and hymns of praise, converting the fields into new heavens. During this whole journey

* Literal meaning of the word *Bethlehem* [Ed.]

the Queen was rejoiced by the sight of her resplendent ministers and vassals and by the sweet interior conversation held with them.

458. Along with these wonderful favors and delights, however, the Lord joined some hardships and inconveniences which the heavenly Mother encountered on the way, for the concourse of many people at the inns, occasioned by the imperial edict, was very painful and uncomfortable to the shyness and modesty of the most pure Virgin Mother and her spouse, since as poor and timid they were accorded less accommodation than others, and experienced more inconvenience than the rich, since the world judges and usually confers its favors according to outward appearance* and personal influence.[†] Our holy pilgrims were obliged repeatedly to listen to sharp reprimands at the inns at which they arrived tired out by their journey, and in some of them they were refused admittance as worthless and contemptible people. Several times they assigned to the Mistress of heaven and earth some corner of the hallway, while at other times She did not even fare so well, being obliged to retire with her spouse to places still more humble and unbecoming in the estimation of the world. But in whatever places She tarried, however contemptible it might be considered, the courtiers of heaven established their court around their supreme King and sovereign Queen. Immediately they surrounded and enclosed them like an impenetrable wall, securing the bridal chamber of Solomon against the terrors of the night (Cant. 3:8). Her most faithful spouse Joseph, seeing the Lady of heaven so well guarded by the angelic hosts, rested and slept, for to this She urged him because of the hardships of travel, while She remained in celestial colloquies with the ten thousand Angels who assisted Her.

459. Although Solomon in the Canticles describes in diverse metaphors and similitudes many great mysteries of the Queen of heaven, yet in chapter III he refers more particularly to what happened to the heavenly Mother in her pregnancy and during this journey. During this time was fulfilled to the letter all that is said of the couch of Solomon (Ib. 7), his chariot and couch of gold, the guard of the most valiant ones of Israel who were stationed around it enjoying the divine vision, and also all the other sayings which are contained in those prophecies. What I have pointed out shall suffice to make them understood, and they should excite our admiration of the wonderful sacraments of the activity of God for the good of man. Who is there among mortals whose heart is not softened? Or who is so proud as not to be abashed? Or so callous as not to be filled with wonder at such miraculous extremes? The infinite and true God was hidden and concealed in the virginal womb of a tender Maiden full of grace and beauty, innocent, pure, mild, sweet, and amiable in the eyes of God and men, surpassing all the Lord has ever or shall ever create! To see this great Lady, though bearing the Treasure of the Divinity, despised, persecuted, neglected, and cast out by the blind ignorance and pride of the world! And on the other hand, while She is thus pushed aside into the last places, to see Her loved and esteemed by the triune God, regaled by his caresses, served by his Angels, revered, defended and assisted in his great and vigilant custody! O children of men, slow and hard of heart (Ps. 4:3), how deceitful are your scales and judgment (as the holy King David said [Ps. 61:10]) in esteeming the rich and despising the poor (James 2:2ff.), exalting the proud and humiliating the lowly, applauding the conceited and casting out the just! Blind is your choice and full of error your judgment, and you shall find yourselves frustrated in all your desires. Ambitiously you seek riches and treasures, and you find yourselves in poverty beating the air.[▲] If you had received the true Ark of God you

* cf. Jn. 7:24 [Ed.]

[†] cf. Lv. 19:15; Acts 10:34 [Ed.]

[▲] cf. I Cor. 9:26 [Ed.]

would have been blessed by the hand of the Almighty like Obededom (II Kg. 6:11), but because you have despised Her what happened to Oza, who was chastised (Ib. 7), has happened to many of you.

460. During this journey the heavenly Lady observed and knew the various conditions of all the souls who came and went, and penetrated into their most secret thoughts and the state of each, in grace or in sin, and the degrees which in these different extremes they possessed. Concerning many souls She also knew whether they were predestined or reprobate, whether they would persevere, fall, or again rise up. All this variety of insight moved Her to the exercise of heroic virtues in regard to the ones as well as the others. For many of them She obtained the grace of perseverance; for others efficacious help to rise from their sin to grace; for others again She prayed to the Lord with affectionate tears, feeling most intense sorrow for the reprobate, though She did not pray as efficaciously for them. Many times, worn out by these sorrows, much more than by the hardships of travel, the strength of her body gave way. On such occasions the holy Angels, full of resplendent light and beauty, bore Her up in their arms so She could rest and recuperate. The sick, afflicted and indigent whom She met on the way She consoled and assisted by asking her most holy Son to come to their aid in their necessities and adversities, because on this journey, due to the multitude and concourse of people, She kept to Herself without speaking, carefully attending to her divine pregnancy which was already evident to all; this was the return which the Mother of Mercy made to mortals for the inhospitality She received from them.

461. For the greater reproach of human ingratitude it happened also that once during these wintry days they reached a stopping place in the midst of a cold rain and snow storm (for the Lord did not desire to spare them this hardship), and they were obliged to take shelter in the stables of the animals because the owners would not furnish better accommodation. The irrational beasts showed them the courtesy and kindness which was refused by human creatures, for they retreated in reverence at the entrance of their Maker and his Mother who carried Him in her virginal womb. The Mistress of all creatures could well have commanded the winds, the frost and the snow not to harm Her, but She would not give such a command in order not to deprive Herself of suffering in imitation of her most holy Son even before He came forth into the world. Therefore the inclemencies of the weather affected Her to a certain extent; however, her most solicitous and faithful spouse St. Joseph did his utmost to shield Her, and still more did the holy Angels seek to protect Her, especially the prince St. Michael who remained at the right side of his Queen without leaving Her even for a moment. Several times when She became tired he led Her by the arm along the way; whenever the Lord permitted he also shielded Her against the weather and performed many other services for the heavenly Queen and the blessed fruit of her womb, Jesus.

462. Thus variously and wonderfully assisted our travelers, Mary most holy and St. Joseph, arrived at the town of Bethlehem at four o'clock on the fifth day, a Saturday. Since it was the time of the winter solstice the sun was already sinking and night was falling. They entered the town and wandered through many streets in search of a lodging house or inn for staying overnight. They knocked at the doors of their acquaintances and nearer family relations, yet they were admitted nowhere, and in many places they met with harsh words and insults. The most modest Queen followed her spouse through the crowds of people while he went from house to house and from door to door. Although She knew the hearts and houses of men would be closed to them, and though to expose her state at her age to the public gaze was more painful to her modesty than their failure to procure a night lodging, She nevertheless desired to obey St. Joseph and suffer this indignity and unmerited shame. While wandering through the streets they passed

the office of the public registry and inscribed their names and paid the fiscal tribute in order to comply with the edict and not be obliged to return. They continued their search among other houses, but having already applied at more than fifty different places they found themselves rejected and sent away from all of them. The heavenly spirits were filled with astonishment at these exalted mysteries of the Most High, which manifested the patience and meekness of his Virgin Mother and the unfeeling obduracy of men; yet at the same time they blessed the Almighty in his works and hidden sacraments, because from that day He desired to accredit and raise to such glory the humility and poverty despised by men.

463. It was nine o'clock at night when the most faithful Joseph, full of bitter and heartrending sorrow, returned to his most prudent Spouse and said: "My sweetest Lady, my heart pines away in sorrow on this occasion, seeing I not only cannot accommodate Thee as Thou dost deserve and as I desire, but cannot even offer Thee any kind of shelter or rest, something rarely or never denied to the most poor and despised in the world. Without doubt there is a mystery in this permission of heaven in not moving the hearts of men to receive us into their homes. I now remember, my Lady, that outside the city walls there is a cave which serves as a shelter for shepherds and their flocks. Let us go there, so if happily it is unoccupied we may there receive some help from heaven, since earthly assistance fails us." The most prudent Virgin answered: "My spouse and master, let not thy most kind heart be afflicted because the most ardent desires, which the affection thou hast for the Lord produce in thee, cannot be fulfilled. Since I bear Him in my womb let us, I beseech thee, render Him gratitude for having disposed events in this way. The place of which thou speakest shall be most suitable to fulfill my desire. Let thy tears of sorrow be turned into tears of joy by the love and possession of poverty, which is the rich and inestimable treasure of my most holy Son. He came from heaven in order to seek it; let us then give Him an occasion to practice it in the joy of our souls. Certainly I cannot be more consoled than to see thee procure it for me. Let us be content to go wherever the Lord shall guide us."^{*} The holy Angels accompanied the heavenly pair, brilliantly lighting up the way, and when they arrived at the city gate they saw the cave was forsaken and unoccupied. Full of heavenly consolation they thanked the Lord for this favor, and then happened what I shall relate in the following chapter.

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

464. My dearest daughter, if thou art of a gentle and docile heart, the divine mysteries which hast written and understood shall be powerful to engender in thee sweet and loving affections for the Author of such and so many wonders, in whose presence I desire thee from this day forward to have a new and great appreciation at seeing thyself rejected and despised by the world. And tell me, my friend, if in exchange for this forgetfulness and contempt accepted with a joyful will God casts upon thee the eyes and the force of his sweetest love, why wouldst thou not buy so cheaply what is worth no less than an infinite price? What do men give thee when they celebrate and esteem thee the most? And what dost thou give up if thou despise them? Is it not all lies and vanity (Ps. 4:3)? Is it not all a fleeting and momentary shadow (Wis. 5:9), which eludes the grasp of those who hasten after it? Hence if thou didst possess all worldly honor, what great feat would it be to despise it as nothing? Consider well how little thou shalt do in casting it aside in order to

* cf. Ps. 79:2; *Gradual*, Vigil of the Nativity (Dec. 24) [Ed.]

gain the love of God himself, and mine and that of his Angels. Deny it all, my beloved, from thy heart. And if the world does not despise thee as much as thou shouldst desire, do thou despise it, and remain free, expeditious and alone so the entire and highest Good may accompany thee, and receive thee with the plenitude of the most felicitous effects of his love, and with liberty correspond to it.

465. My most holy Son is such a faithful Lover of souls that He has set me as the Mistress and living example in order to teach them the love of humility, and the efficacious contempt of vanity and pride. He also ordained that for his magnificence and mine that I, his servant and Mother, would be left without shelter and welcome among men, so this abandonment would afterwards motivate loving and affectionate souls to offer themselves to Him, obliging Him with such a polite will to come and live in them. He likewise sought solitude and poverty, not because these means were necessary for Himself in order to practice the virtues in a most perfect degree, but in order to teach mortals that this is the shortest and most secure way for being lifted up in divine love and union with God himself.

466. Thou knowest well, my dearest, thou art incessantly instructed and admonished by light from above to forget the terrestrial and visible, girding thyself with strength, (Prov. 31:17) and raising thyself to imitate me, copying in thyself, according to thy capacity, the actions and virtues manifested to thee in my life. This is the primary intention of the knowledge which thou dost receive for writing my Life; for thou hast in me this standard which thou mayest use to conform thy life and works in the manner in which I imitated those of my sweetest Son. Thou must moderate the fear which this command has caused thee, imagining it superior to thy strength, and thou must gather courage by what my most holy Son said as recorded by the evangelist St. Matthew: *Be you perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect* (Mt. 5:48). This will of the Most High which He proposes to his holy Church is not impossible to his children; and if they on their part dispose themselves, He shall deny to none of them this grace of attaining this resemblance to the heavenly Father, since my most holy Son has merited it for them. Yet the heavy forgetfulness and contempt* men have for his Redemption impede its fruit from being efficaciously attained in them.

467. Of thee, my daughter, I especially desire this perfection, and I invite thee to it by the sweet law of love to which I direct my instruction. Consider and weigh by the divine light the obligation under which I place thee, and labor to correspond to it with the prudence of a faithful and solicitous daughter, without allowing any difficulty or labor hinder thee, or omitting any virtue or work of perfection, however arduous it may be. Neither must thou be content with soliciting thy friendship with God and thy own salvation; for if thou dost desire to be perfect in my imitation and fulfill what the Gospel teaches, thou must labor to procure the salvation of other souls and the exaltation of the holy Name of my Son, and to be an instrument in his powerful hand for strong works for his greater pleasure and glory.

* cf. Prov. 18:3 [Ed.]