

BOOK FOUR

SECOND OF PART II

Describing the Apprehensions of St. Joseph due to the Pregnancy of Most Holy Mary, the Birth of Christ our Lord, His Circumcision, the Adoration of the Kings, the Presentation of the Infant Jesus in the Temple, the Flight into Egypt, the Death of the Holy Innocents, and the Return to Nazareth.

CHAPTER I

St. Joseph becomes Aware of the Pregnancy of His Spouse the Virgin Mary, and becomes Greatly Worried since He Knows He had No Part in It.

375. The divine pregnancy of the Princess of heaven had advanced to its fifth month when most chaste Joseph, her spouse, began to take some notice of the disposition and growth of her virginal womb; for due to the natural perfection and elegance of the heavenly Spouse, as I have already remarked (115), any change could not long remain concealed and would so much the sooner be discovered. One day when St. Joseph was full of anxious doubts and saw Her coming out of her oratory he noticed more particularly this evident change (Mt. 1:18) without being able to explain away what he saw so clearly with his eyes. The man of God was wounded to his inmost heart by an arrow of grief, unable to ward off the force of evidence which at the same time wounded his soul. The principal cause of his grief was the most chaste, intense, and true love with which he cherished his most faithful Spouse, and in which he had from the beginning given over to Her his whole heart; moreover, her charming graces and incomparable holiness had captured and bound to Her his inmost soul. Since She was so perfect and upright in her modesty and humble gravity, besides his careful respect in serving Her St. Joseph had the desire, as it were naturally flowing from his love for Her, of a correspondence of his love from his Spouse. Thus it was ordained by the Lord so by the desire for this interchange of affection he would be incited to love and serve Her more faithfully.

376. St. Joseph fulfilled this obligation as a most faithful spouse and as the guardian of the sacrament which as yet was concealed from him. The more he was solicitous in serving and venerating his Spouse, and loving Her with a most pure, chaste, holy and just love, so much the greater was his desire to see Her correspond to his affection and service. He never manifested or spoke of this desire because of the reverence elicited by the humble majesty of his Spouse, and also because the more than angelic purity, treatment and conversation of the Virgin with him had given him no apprehension in this regard. But when he found himself thus unexpectedly in the face of this disclosure, where the clear evidence of his senses allowed no denial, his soul was torn asunder by sorrowful surprise; however, though overwhelmed by the evidence of this change in his Spouse, he gave his thoughts no greater liberty than to admit what his eyes could not fail to perceive, for being a holy and just man (Ib. 19), although he saw the effect he withheld

his judgment as to the cause.* Without doubt if the Saint had believed his Spouse had any guilt in causing this condition he would have died of sorrow.

377. Joined to this was the certainty he had no part in this pregnancy, the effects of which were before his eyes, and the inevitable dishonor which would follow as soon as it would become public. This concern weighed heavily upon St. Joseph, since he was of a most magnanimous and honorable heart, and by his great prudence he knew how to weigh the enduring of his own infamy and that of his Spouse if such suffering would come upon them. The third and most intimate cause of his sorrow, and which gave him the deepest pain, was the dread of being obliged to deliver his Spouse over to the authorities to be stoned, for this was the punishment of an adulteress convicted of the crime (Lv. 20:10; Dt. 22:23). Among these considerations, as among the sharp points of swords, the heart of St. Joseph suffered singular pain, or rather many pains together, without finding any refuge for alleviation in this unforeseen predicament beyond the well-established complaisance he had experienced with his Spouse. Yet since all outward signs testified to the unexpected new situation, there was no escape from these tormenting thoughts, and since he dared not communicate about his grievous affliction with anyone, he found himself surrounded by the sorrows of death (Ps. 17:5), and he experienced in himself the saying of the Scriptures that *jealousy is hard as hell* (Cant. 8:6).

378. When he attempted to follow out these thoughts in solitude grief suspended his faculties; if his thoughts touched upon the wrong which his senses led him to suspect, they melted away as ice before the sun, or vanished like dust before the wind, as soon as he remembered the well-earned holiness of his modest and circumspect Spouse. If he tried to suspend the workings of his chaste love he could not, for She continued to present Herself to his thoughts as the most worthy object of his love, and the hidden truth of her fidelity had more power of attracting his love than the deceitful appearances of infidelity had to destroy it. The strong and sure bond which truth, reason and justice had woven regarding her fidelity could not be broken. He found no suitable occasion of opening his mind to his heavenly Spouse, nor did her serene and heavenly equanimity seem to invite him to such an explanation. Although he could not but admit the change in her womb, yet he could not conceive how her purity and holiness could be compatible with any infidelity such as this change might indicate, since that sin was incompatible with such purity, equanimity, sanctity, discretion, and all the graces together manifested as increasing each day in most holy Mary.

379. In his pains the holy spouse Joseph appealed to the tribunal of the Lord in prayer, and placing himself in his presence he said: "Most high Lord and God, my desires and sighs are not unknown to Thee (Ps. 37:10). I find myself cast about by the violent waves of sorrow which through my senses have come to afflict my heart. I have given myself over with entire confidence to the Spouse whom Thou hast given me. I have confided entirely in her holiness, and the signs of this unexpected change in Her are giving rise to tormenting and fearful doubts lest my confidence be misplaced. Nothing have I until now seen in Her which could give occasion for any doubt of her modesty and extraordinary virtue; yet at the same time I cannot deny that She is pregnant. To think She has been unfaithful to me, and has offended Thee, would be temerity in view of such rare purity and holiness; yet to deny what my own eyes perceive is impossible. But it is not impossible for me to die of grief, unless there is some mystery hidden beneath it which I cannot yet fathom. Reason proclaims Her as blameless, while the senses accuse Her. She conceals from me the cause of her pregnancy, while I have it before my eyes.

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

What shall I do? We have both come to an agreement concerning our vows of chastity, and have promised to keep them for thy glory; if it could be possible that She has violated her fidelity toward Thee and toward me, I would defend thy honor and would forget mine for love of Thee. Yet how could She preserve such purity and sanctity in all other things if She had committed such a grave crime? And on the other hand, why does She, who is so holy and prudent, conceal this matter from me? I withhold and defer my judgment. Not being able to penetrate the cause of what I see, I pour out in thy presence my afflicted soul (Ps. 141:3), God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Receive my tears as an acceptable sacrifice, and if my sins merit thy indignation, let thy own clemency and kindness move Thee not to despise my excruciating sorrow. I do not believe that Mary has offended Thee; yet much less can I presume that there is a mystery of which I, as her spouse, am not to be informed. Govern Thou my mind and heart by thy divine light so I may know and fulfill that which is most pleasing to Thee.”

380. St. Joseph persevered in this kind of prayer, adding many more affectionate petitions, for even though he conjectured there must be some mystery in the pregnancy of most holy Mary hidden from him, he could not find assurance therein; yet he had no greater reason offered to him than this in order to provide a way to avoid the judgment that She had contracted guilt in the pregnancy, respecting the sanctity of the heavenly Lady, and thus the idea that the most holy Queen might be the Mother of the Messiah did not come to his mind. If at times he drove away his conjectures they would return in greater number and with more urgent force of evidence; thus was he cast about on the turbulent waves of doubt. From sheer exhaustion he would at times fall into a condition of mind wherein he could find neither an anchor of certainty for his doubts, nor tranquility for his heart, nor any standard by which he could direct his course. This torment of St. Joseph was so great that it gave evident proof of his incomparable prudence and sanctity, meriting by this trial to be found fit by God for the singular blessing which awaited him.

381. All that passed in the heart of St. Joseph was known to the Princess of heaven, who penetrated into his interior by the light of her divine science. Although her soul was full of tenderness and compassion for the sufferings of her spouse, She said not a word in the matter, but continued to serve him with all devotion and solicitude. The man of God watched Her without outward demonstration, yet with a greater concern than that of any man who ever lived. The pregnancy of most holy Mary was not burdensome or painful to Her, but as the great Lady in serving him at table or any other domestic occupations necessarily disclosed her state more and more openly, St. Joseph noticed all these actions and movements and with deep affliction of soul verified all his observations. Notwithstanding his being a holy and just man, he permitted himself to be respected and served by the most holy Virgin after their espousal, claiming in all things the position of head and husband of the family, though with rare humility and prudence. As long as he was ignorant of the mystery of his Spouse he judged it right, within appropriate limits, to show his authority in imitation of the ancient Fathers and Patriarchs, for he knew they demanded subjection and prompt obedience from their wives, and he did not desire to recede from their example. He would have been right in this course if most holy Mary, our Lady, had been no more than other women. Yet though there was such a great difference, no woman ever existed or will exist who was or will be so obedient, humble and devoted to her husband as the most exalted Queen was toward her spouse. She served him with incomparable respect and promptitude, and though She knew his troubled thoughts and observations concerning her pregnancy She omitted no service due to him, nor did She try to conceal or palliate her state, for such evasion or duplicity would not have corresponded with her angelic truthfulness and candor, nor the generosity and magnanimity of her most noble Heart.

382. The great Lady could easily have asserted her entire innocence and referred to the testimony of St. Elizabeth and Zacharias, for if St. Joseph had any suspicion of guilt in Her he could naturally have supposed it to have been incurred during her stay with them; by this means, or by others, though without manifesting the mystery, She could have excused Herself and removed the concern of St. Joseph. The Mistress of prudence and humility did nothing of the kind, for these virtues did not allow Her to think of Herself, nor trust the justification of her mysterious condition to her own explanation. With great wisdom She resigned the whole matter into the hands of divine Providence. Though her compassion for her spouse and her love for him inclined Her to console and comfort him, She would not do it by clearing Herself or by concealing her pregnancy, but rather by serving him with more devoted demonstrations of love and by trying to cheer him up, asking him what She could do for him and lovingly showing her devoted and submissive affection. Many times She served him on her knees, and though this somewhat consoled St. Joseph, yet on the other hand it was also a cause for new grief, for thus he only saw the motives of love and esteem multiplied while still remaining uncertain whether She had offended. The heavenly Lady offered up continual prayers for him and besought the Most High to look upon him and console him; as for the rest She submitted all to the will of His Majesty.

383. St. Joseph could not entirely conceal his cruel sorrow, and therefore he often appeared to be in doubt and sad suspense. Sometimes, carried away by his grief, he spoke to his heavenly Spouse with some degree of severity, such as he had not shown before. This was the natural effect of the affliction of his heart, not of anger or vengeful feelings, for these never entered his thoughts as we shall see later (388). The most prudent Lady, however, never lost the sweetness of her countenance nor showed any demonstration of sorrow, but rather redoubled her efforts to relieve her husband. She served him at table, offered him a seat, brought his meal, and administered drink; after this, which She performed with incomparable grace, St. Joseph told Her to sit down, and each hour he assured himself more of the certainty of her pregnancy. There is no doubt all this was one of the greatest trials not only for St. Joseph but for the Princess of heaven, and greatly manifested the most profound humility and wisdom of her most holy soul. The Lord thereby gave Her an opportunity of exercising and proving all her virtues, for not only had He not commanded Her to conceal the sacrament of her pregnancy, but He had not expressly manifested his divine will as on other occasions. It seemed God left this matter in her hands and entrusted it to the divine science and virtues of his chosen Spouse, without giving Her special enlightenment or help. Divine Providence gave most holy Mary and her most faithful spouse an opportunity to exercise in a heroic manner the gifts and graces which He had infused into them, and delighted (according to our way of speaking) in the faith, hope and love, in the humility, patience, peace and tranquility of those guileless hearts in the midst of such sorrowful affliction. In order to increase their glory and furnish to the world an example of holiness and prudence, and in order to hear the sweet cries of his most holy Mother and of her most chaste spouse, He became as it were deaf to their prolonged invocations and delayed answering them until his own opportune and appropriate time.

INSTRUCTION OF OUR LADY, THE MOST HOLY QUEEN.

384. My dearest daughter, most exalted are the thoughts and intentions of the Lord; his providence with souls is sweet and powerful, and He is admirable in the government of all of them, especially of his friends and chosen ones. If mortals would strive to know the loving care

for their direction and advancement as shown by this Father of mercies, they would be relieved and would not be involved in such irksome, useless and dangerous anxieties (Mt. 6:25ff.), living in perpetual toils and vain trust in the help of creatures, for they would resign themselves without hesitation to the infinite wisdom and love which, with paternal sweetness and gentleness, would watch over all their thoughts, words and actions, and all things suitable for them (I Peter 5:7). I do not desire thee to be ignorant of this truth, but rather understand how the Lord from all eternity bears in his mind all the predestined of the different times and ages, and by the invincible force of his infinite wisdom and goodness He continually disposes and prepares all the blessings useful to them so the end desired for them may be attained.

385. Hence it is very important for the rational creature to allow himself to be led by the hand of the Lord and leave all to his divine disposition, for mortal men are ignorant of their ways (Eccles. 7:1) and the end to which they lead (Dt. 32:1ff.). In their ignorance they must not presume to choose, lest they make themselves guilty of great temerity and incur the danger of damnation. But if they resign themselves with all their heart to the providence of the Most High, acknowledging Him as their Father and themselves as his children and creatures, His Majesty will constitute Himself as their Protector, Helper and Ruler, and He will assume these offices with such love that He desires to call heaven and earth to witness how much He considers it his affair to govern his own and direct those who trust and resign themselves into his hands. If God were capable of grief or jealousy like men, it would be aroused in Him at seeing creatures claiming a part in providing for the welfare of souls, and seeing souls go in search of anything necessary for them anywhere else than to the Lord himself, who has them in his care (Wis. 12:13). Mortals would not be so ignorant of this truth if they would study what happens between a father and his children, a husband and his wife, one friend and another, and a prince and with the subject he loves and desires to honor; all that these do is nothing in comparison with the love which God has for his children, and what He can and will do for them.

386. Yet though men in general believe this truth, no one can fully estimate the love of God and its particular effects on those souls who totally resign themselves and give themselves to his will. It is not proper, my daughter, to manifest what thou knowest of this, nor is it possible, yet thou must not lose sight of it in the Lord. His Majesty says not a hair of his elect shall perish because He has them numbered (Lk. 21:18; 12:7). He directs their footsteps toward eternal life (Ps. 36:23) and keeps them from death; He observes their labors, lovingly corrects their defects (Prov. 3:12), favors their desires, forestalls their anxieties (Wis. 6:14), defends them in danger (Ib. 5:17), rejoices them in peace (Cant. 8:5), strengthens them in battle (Ps. 26:3), and assists them in tribulation (Ps. 90:15). His wisdom is at their service against deceit, and his goodness for their sanctification. Since He is infinite, whom none can hinder or resist, He executes what He desires, and He desires to be entirely at the service of the just, who are in his grace and trust themselves wholly to Him. Who could weigh what and how many are the blessings which He would shower upon a heart disposed in this manner to receive them!

387. If thou, my dearest, dost desire to obtain this good fortune, imitate me with true solicitude and apply thyself from now on to establish in thyself a true resignation to divine Providence. If He sends thee tribulations, sorrows and labors, accept and embrace them with tranquility of soul, with patience, lively faith, and hope in the goodness of the Most High, who always provides that which is the most secure and profitable for thy salvation. Choose nothing for thyself, since God knows thy ways; trust thyself to the heavenly Father and Spouse, who shall shield and assist thee with most faithful love. Study also my works since they are known to thee, and remember that

the greatest suffering of my life, besides the hardships suffered by my most holy Son, was to see the tribulations of my spouse St. Joseph and his grief in the matter which thou hast described.