

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), though he saw the effect he withheld

his judgment regarding 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. 22:22). 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 satisfaction 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 God and eternal *Lord, all my desire is before Thee, and my groaning is not hidden from Thee* (Ps. 37:10). I find myself combating the violent waves which through my senses have come to afflict my heart. I have submitted myself with confidence to the Spouse whom I have received from thy hand. I have trusted in her great sanctity; yet the testimonies of the new condition I see in Her call into question, in sorrow and fear, whether my hopes are frustrated. Nothing until now have I known of Her which could cast doubt upon her modesty and excellent virtues; yet neither can I deny that She is pregnant. To judge She has been unfaithful to me, and has offended Thee, would be temerity in view of such rare purity and sanctity; yet to deny what my vision assures me is impossible. But it is not impossible for me to die of this grief, unless there is enclosed some mystery which I do not discover. Reason exonerates Her, while the senses condemn Her. She conceals from me the cause of her pregnancy, while I have it before my eyes. What shall I do? We have both come to

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

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 why, being so holy and prudent, does She conceal this matter from me? I suspend and withhold my judgment, ignorant of the cause of what I see. I pour out in thy presence my afflicted spirit (Ps. 141:3), O God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Receive my tears as an acceptable sacrifice, and if my faults merit thy indignation, let thy own clemency and kindness move Thee not to despise my vivid sorrow. I do not judge that Mary has offended Thee; yet being her spouse I also cannot assume there is a mystery of which I am unworthy to be informed. Govern my thoughts and my heart by thy divine light so I may know and fulfill what is most acceptable to thy pleasure.”

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 was gazing upon his interior by the divine science and light She possessed. 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 spouse. 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 strong, and He is admirable in the government of all of them, especially of his friends and chosen ones. Mortals should come to know the loving care taken by

this Father of mercies to guide and direct them, worry less about themselves, and not give themselves up to such irritating, useless and dangerous anxieties (Mt. 6:25ff.) by which they live hectically, seeking various reliance on other creatures; * dependent upon Him, they would resign themselves secure in 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 ignore this truth, but to understand how the Lord from all his eternity has present in his divine mind all the predestined which are to exist in the different times and ages; and by the invincible force of his infinite wisdom and goodness He proceeds to dispose and arrange all the goods suitable for them, so in the end what the Lord has determined for them may be achieved.

385. For this reason it is so important for the rational creature to allow itself to be led by the hand of the Lord, submitting itself entirely to his divine disposition; for mortal men are ignorant of their ways (Eccles. 7:1) and the end to which they must lead (Dt. 32:1ff.). In their ignorance they must not by themselves presume to choose, for doing so would be great temerity and incur the danger of their perdition. But if they deliver 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, Guardian and Ruler with such love that He desires heaven and earth to know how He has taken upon Himself the office to govern his own people and rule over those who trust in Him and deliver themselves into his hands. If God was capable of feeling sorrow, or being jealous like men, He would experience them when any creature seizes a part in the care of souls, and when they go in search of anything necessary for them anywhere else than to the Lord himself, who takes it to his account (Wis. 12:13). Mortals could not ignore this truth if they would consider among themselves the care a father has for his children, a husband for his wife, one friend for another, and a prince and with his favorite subject he loves and desires to honor. All this is nothing in comparison with the love which God has for his children, and what He can and will do for them.

386. Yet although men for the most part generally believe this truth, no one can realize what divine love is and its particular effects on those souls who totally resign themselves and leave themselves to his will. It is not possible, my daughter, to manifest what thou knowest of this, nor is it proper; 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 all numbered (Lk. 21:18; 12:7). He directs their footsteps toward life (Ps. 36:23), and diverts them from death; He attends to their labors, lovingly corrects their defects (Prov. 3:12), advances their desires, anticipates their needs (Wis. 6:14), defends them in danger (Ib. 5:17), regales them in tranquility (Cant. 8:5), consoles them in battle (Ps. 26:3), assists them in tribulation (Ps. 90:15), defends them from deceit by his wisdom, sanctifies them by his goodness, strengthens them by his power, and as infinite, whose will none can resist or hinder, He thus executes what He can, and can do all He desires, and desires to give all to the just man who is in his grace and trusts in Him alone. Who can weigh what and how many are the goods He showers upon a heart disposed in this manner to receive them!

387. If thou, my friend, dost desire to achieve this good fortune, imitate me with true carefulness, and from this day transform thyself entirely in order to efficaciously achieve a true resignation to divine Providence. If He sends thee tribulations, sorrows and labors, receive them and embrace them with equanimity of heart, tranquility of spirit, patience, living faith, and hope in the goodness of the Most High, who shall always give thee what is most secure and suitable

* cf. Jer. 17:5-8 [Ed.]

for thy salvation. Make no choice of anything, for God knows thee and thy ways; trust thyself to thy heavenly Father and Spouse, who with most faithful love shall support and protect thee. Be attentive to my works, since they are not hidden to thee, and know that except for the labors endured by my most holy Son, the greatest suffering of my life was to see the tribulations of my spouse Joseph, and his pains on the occasion of which thou hast written.