

CHAPTER VII

Most Holy Mary Prepares the Swaddling Clothes and Blankets for the Infant God, with most Ardent Longings to See Him Born.

438. The divine pregnancy of Mary most holy, the Mother of the incarnate Word, had already far advanced. In order to labor in all things with the plenitude of celestial prudence, although knowing She must prepare the swaddling clothes and the other items necessary for the desired birth, She did not desire to proceed without knowing the will and command of the Lord and of her holy spouse in order to comply in all things with the loyalty of an obedient and most faithful handmaid. Though She could have acted for Herself in such matters pertaining to her office of chosen Mother of her most holy Son, She would not undertake anything without speaking to St. Joseph. Therefore She said to him: "My master, it is now time for us to prepare the necessary items for the birth of my most holy Son. And although His Majesty wishes to be treated as one of the children of men, humbling Himself in order to suffer their hardships, yet on our part it is reasonable that in his service and as a courtesy, in the care and assistance we render Him during his infancy, we show that we recognize Him as our God and the true King and Lord. If thou give me permission I shall begin to prepare the swaddling clothes and blankets in order to receive and raise Him. I have spun with my own hands a linen cloth which shall now serve as his first swaddling clothes; and thou, my master, seek to procure some woolen cloth of a soft and smooth texture and a humble color for his blankets. Later on I shall weave a seamless tunic suitable for Him. And in order to do all things right let us offer special prayers, beseeching His Highness to govern us, direct us, and manifest to us his divine will so we may thus proceed according to his greater pleasure."

439. "My Spouse and Lady," answered St. Joseph, "if it were possible to serve with my own heart's blood my Lord and God and thus fulfill his and thy commands I would be content and happy to shed it amid most atrocious torments. Since I cannot do this I would desire to have great riches and costly fabrics with which to serve Thee on this occasion. Do Thou dispose matters as Thou dost see fit, for in all things I desire to obey Thee as thy servant." Thus they prayed, and the Most High responded to each one, renewing the knowledge and notice He had given many times before to the sovereign Lady, yet now repeated simultaneously to Her and to St. Joseph: "I have come from heaven to earth in order to exalt humility and humble the proud, to honor poverty and despise riches, to destroy vanity and establish truth, and to show worthy appreciation of labors. Therefore it is my will that in the humanity I have received thou treat Me exteriorly as if I was the child of both of thee, and interiorly recognize Me as the Son of my eternal Father and the true God, with the veneration and love due to Me as man and God."

440. Most holy Mary and St. Joseph, confirmed by this divine voice in the wisdom with which they were to proceed in the raising of the infant God, conferred with each other regarding the most exalted and perfect manner ever seen among mere creatures of reverencing Him as the true and infinite God, while at the same time treating Him in the eyes of the world as the son of both of them, for this was to be the opinion of the world, and such conduct the Lord himself had enjoined upon them. Having therefore come to an agreement, they lived up to this command of the Lord with such perfection that they were the admiration of all heaven, and further on I shall say more regarding this (506, 508, 536, 545, etc.). They both concluded that according to the limited means allowed them by their poverty they would expend whatever they could afford in the service of the infant God without going into excess or failing in anything, for the sacrament

of the King (Tob. 12:7) was to be concealed in humble poverty, though at the same time they desired to exercise their burning love as far as possible. St. Joseph, in exchange for some of his work, accepted two pieces of woolen cloth such as his heavenly Spouse had described; the one white, the other more mulberry than brownish-gray, both of them the best quality he could find. From these the heavenly Queen cut the first little blankets of her most holy Son, while from the piece of linen which She herself had spun and woven She cut the swaddling clothes and undergarments. Being woven by such hands it was a most delicate piece of cloth. She had commenced work upon it from the day of her entrance into their house at Nazareth, for She had intended it for the temple as a present. Although it could now serve for another much higher purpose, nevertheless She offered whatever remained of it after She had completed the garments of the infant God as a gift to the temple of Jerusalem according to her original intention. All the articles and coverings necessary for her divine Infant the great Lady prepared with her own hands, and while She sewed and trimmed them She shed tears of ineffable devotion, remaining continually on her knees. St. Joseph gathered such flowers and herbs as he could find from which, together with other aromatic materials, the diligent Mother made fragrant water, more than angelic, sprinkling them upon the sacred vestments for the Victim and sacrifice (Eph. 5:2) whom She awaited. She then folded and laid them away in a chest which She afterwards took along with Her to Bethlehem, as I shall relate farther on (452).

441. All these works of the Princess of heaven, Mary most holy, must not be understood and weighed as being void and without life as I here represent them, but of incomparable grace and loveliness (Ps. 95:6), full of sanctity, exalted merit, and greater perfection than human intellect can comprehend, because She performed all these works as the Mother of Wisdom and the Queen of all virtues. In preparing for the appearance of the most holy humanity of her Son in this world She celebrated the dedication of the living temple of God. The sovereign Queen understood better than all the rest of creatures the ineffable grandeur of the mystery of the Incarnation of a God and of his coming into the world. Not in a spirit of doubt, but inflamed by love and veneration, She repeated many times the words of Solomon when he built the temple (II Par. 6:18): "How is it possible that God shall dwell with men on earth? If all the heavens, and the heaven of heavens, cannot receive Thee, how can this habitation of thy humanity, formed in my womb, contain Thee?" But if the temple of Solomon, which served only as a place in which God would hear the prayers within it, was built and dedicated with such lavish expenditure of gold, silver, treasures and sacrifices (III Kg. 6), what would not the Mother of the true Solomon do for the building up and the dedication of the living temple in which dwelt corporeally the plenitude of the true Divinity (Col. 2:9), the eternal and incomprehensible God? All these innumerable sacrifices and treasures of the figurative temple most holy Mary duplicated not in gold, silver, or rich texture, since God sought no such riches in the living temple, but in heroic virtues and canticles of praise by which She fructified and extolled the graces and gifts of the Most High. She offered up holocausts of her most ardent Heart, searching through all the Sacred Scriptures, summarizing the hymns, psalms and canticles, and applying them to this mystery, adding much more Herself. In a mystical and yet altogether real manner She fulfilled the ancient figures and types by her virtues and her interior and exterior actions. She called upon and invited all creatures to praise their God, to give honor and glory to their Creator, and to place the hope of their sanctification in his coming into the world. In many of these exercises the most happy and blessed spouse Joseph took part.

442. The most exalted merits which the Princess of heaven accumulated by these acts and exercises, and the pleasure and satisfaction with which they were received by the Lord, cannot be

described by human tongue nor understood by any created understanding. If the least degree of grace which any creature merits by an act of virtue is more valuable than all the created universe, to what value did grace reach in Her, whose acts exceeded in value not only all the sacrifices, offerings and holocausts of the old law, and all the merits of the human race, but also far surpassed those of the highest Seraphim? The loving affections of the heavenly Lady in hoping for her Son and true God in order to receive Him in her arms, nurture Him at her breast, feed Him with her own hands, converse with Him, serve Him, and adore Him made man from her own flesh and blood, reached such an extreme that in this most sweet conflagration of love She would have breathed forth her spirit and been dissolved if the miraculous assistance of God himself had not preserved Her from death, comforted Her, and fortified her life. Many times would She have lost her life if it had not been preserved by her most holy Son, because ordinarily She saw Him in her virginal womb, and with divine clearness She saw his humanity united to the Divinity and all the interior acts of that most holy soul, the condition and posture of his body, and the prayers offered up by Him for Her, for St. Joseph, for all the human race, and especially for the predestined. All these and other mysteries were open to Her, and in perceiving them She was altogether inflamed with the desire of imitating and exalting Him, since She bore within Her the devouring fires which illumine yet do not consume (Ex. 3:2).

443. Amid this conflagration of divine love She spoke sometimes to her most holy Son: “My sweetest Love, Creator of the universe, when shall my eyes enjoy the light of thy divine countenance? When shall my arms be consecrated as the altar of the Victim awaited by thine eternal Father? When shall I as thy slave kiss the earth where Thou hast trod, and attain as thy Mother the kiss desired by my soul (Cant. 1:1), in order to participate in thy own Spirit from thy divine breath? When shall the inaccessible light, which Thou art, true God of true God, and Light of light (Jn. 1:9), manifest Thyself to mortals after so many ages in which Thou hast been hidden from our sight? When shall the children of Adam, held captive by their sins, know their Redeemer (Bar. 3:38), see their salvation (I Tim. 3:16; Is. 52:10), and find among themselves their Teacher (Is. 30:20), their Brother, and their true Father? O my Life, Light of my soul, my strength, my Beloved, for whom dying I live! Son of my womb, how can I fulfill the office of a Mother, since I do not merit such a title, nor do I know how to be even a slave? How shall I treat Thee worthily, I who am a vile and poor worm? How shall I serve and minister to Thee, since Thou art sanctity itself and infinite goodness, and I am only dust and ashes? How shall I dare speak in thy presence or stand before Thy divine Reverence? Do Thou, Master of my entire being, who hast chosen me, the little one among the other daughters of Adam, govern my actions, direct my desires, and inflame my affections, so in all things I may be able to give Thee pleasure and satisfaction. And what shall I do, my Good, since from my womb Thou art to come into the world in order to suffer affronts and die for the human race, if I do not die with Thee and accompany Thee in thy sacrifice, Thou who art my being and my life? Let the same cause and motive which shall take away thy life take away mine, since they are so closely united. Less than thy death shall suffice to redeem the world, yea thousands of worlds; let me die for Thee and suffer thy ignominies while Thou, by thy love and light, sanctify the world and enlighten the darkness of mortals. And if it is not possible to revoke the decree of the eternal Father that Redemption be abundant (Ps. 129:7) and thy excessive charity to be satisfied (Eph. 2:4), receive my affections, and let me take part in all the labors of thy life, since Thou art my Son and Lord.”

444. The variety of these and other most sweet sentiments of love uttered by the Queen made Her most beautiful in the eyes of the Prince of the eternities (Esther 2:9) who was enshrined in the virginal chamber of her womb. All her interior movements were conformable to the actions

of that most sacred and deified humanity, for as a worthy Mother of such a Son She closely observed them as models for her imitation. Sometimes the infant God would place Himself on his knees in order to pray to the Father, or assume the position of one crucified as if to exercise Himself therein beforehand. From that retirement (as even now from the highest throne in heaven) He looked upon and comprehended by the science of his most holy soul all that He knows even at this day, and no mortal of the past, present or future, with all his thoughts and actions, was hidden from his view; to all things He attended as the Lord and Redeemer. And since these mysteries were manifest also to his heavenly Mother, and since She was also endowed with all the graces and gifts necessary for acting in concert with Him, She brought forth such great fruits of sanctity that no human words can ever describe them. But if we were not perverted in our judgments and hardened as stone, we would find it impossible at the sight and experience of these vast and admirable works to remain untouched by loving sorrow and grateful acknowledgment.

INSTRUCTION WHICH THE QUEEN, MARY MOST HOLY, GAVE ME.

445. The lesson of this chapter, my daughter, is for thee to bear in mind the reverence with which thou must handle all the items consecrated and devoted to the divine service, and at the same time estimate how reprehensible is the irreverence with which the ministers of the Lord offend in their disregard for the sacred objects. They must not despise or forget the indignation of His Majesty against them for the gross discourtesy and ingratitude which they ordinarily show by handling the sacred ornaments and objects of worship without attention and respect. And much greater is the anger of the Lord against those who possess the incomes or stipends of his most precious blood if they waste and squander them in vanities and obscenities, or profane things and indecencies. They seek for their sustenance and convenience what is most costly and valuable, while for the honor and worship of the Lord they are satisfied with what is most cheap, common and ordinary. When this happens, especially in regard to the linens which touch the body and blood of my most holy Son, such as corporals and purificators, I desire thee to understand that the holy Angels who assist at the most exalted and sublime sacrifice are as it were struck with horror and cover their eyes at the sight, full of astonishment that the Almighty bears with them and suffers such boldness and presumption. Although not all offend in this yet there are many, and few distinguish themselves in outward respect and care in the divine worship, or treat the sacred objects with due reverence; they are the smaller number, and even they do not all have an upright intention, not observing this due respect out of reverence but out of vanity and for other human ends. Thus they who adore and worship their Creator in spirit and truth (Jn. 4:24), and with a pure and upright intention, have become very scarce.

446. Consider, my dearest, what we should feel who see the incomprehensible being of the Most High, and know his immense goodness has created men in order to adore Him and give Him reverence and worship, and for this reason He has graciously left this as a law in nature itself, and yet see with what ingratitude men correspond to their immense Creator when the very things they have received from his generous hand in order to honor Him they withhold from his service, choosing for their Creator the most vile and rejected, and for their vanities the most precious and estimable (Mal. 1:8). This fault is little thought of and recognized, and therefore I desire thee not only to deplore it with true sorrow but also to make reparation for it as far as possible during the time in which thou art superioress. Give to the Lord the best, and instruct thy religious to attend with a sincere and devout heart in keeping clean and in order the sacred

articles, and this not only for their own convent but also by seeking to furnish other poor churches with the corporals and vestments of which they stand in need. Let them be convinced the Lord shall repay their holy zeal for his worship, and shall relieve their poverty and the necessities of their convent like a Father, and thereby it shall never become poorer. This is the most appropriate occupation and legitimate business of the spouses of Christ, and in this they ought to consume their time which may remain after fulfilling the obligations of the choir and other duties of obedience. If all religious would busy themselves purposefully in these honorable, praiseworthy and agreeable occupations they would never suffer any want, and they would maintain an angelic existence in this life. Yet because they do not desire to attend to this service of the Lord many of them, forsaken by his hand, turn toward dangerous frivolities and distractions, which being abominable in my eyes I do not want thee to describe or even think about, except to deplore them from thy heart and avert such displeasure and offense against God.

447. Yet because my will for special reasons is inclined to look lovingly upon the inhabitants of thy convent, I desire thee in my name and by my authority to admonish and lovingly urge them always to live retired and dead to the world, with unbroken forgetfulness of all that passes within it; that among themselves their conversation must be of heaven (Philip. 3:20) and of things divine; and that above all they preserve intact the mutual peace and love to which I have so often exhorted thee. If they obey me in this I offer them my protection, and I shall constitute myself their Mother, their help and defense in the same way as I am thine, and I also promise them my continual and efficacious intercession with my most holy Son if they do not displease me. For all this thou must persuade them to have a special love and devotion toward me, engrafting it in their hearts. In being thus faithful they shall attain all thou dost desire for them and much more, for I shall obtain it for them. So they can occupy themselves with joy and alacrity in preparing the necessary items for divine worship, and gladly undertake all that pertains to it, remind them of all I did in the service of my most holy Son and of the temple. I desire thee to understand that the holy Angels were full of admiration at the zeal, careful attention, and neatness with which I took charge of all that belonged to the service of my Son and Lord. This loving and reverent solicitude caused me to prepare all that was necessary for his raising up beforehand, and hence I was never in need of anything necessary for clothing Him and administering to his comfort (as some have thought), for my prudence and love would not permit any negligence or inadvertence in this regard.