

CHAPTER V

St. Joseph Resolves to Serve Most Holy Mary in All Things with Reverence; what Her Majesty Did in Response, and Other Particulars of Their Behavior toward Each Other.

418. The most faithful spouse Joseph, after being informed of the mystery and sacrament of the Incarnation, was filled with such high and appropriate sentiments concerning his Spouse that although he had always been holy and perfect he was changed into a new man. He resolved to act toward the heavenly Lady according to a new rule and with much greater reverence, as I shall relate going forward. This was conformable to the wisdom of the Saint and due to the excellence of his Spouse, for St. Joseph by heavenly enlightenment saw well that he was the servant and She the Lady of heaven and earth. In order to satisfy his desire for honoring and reverencing Her as the Mother of God, whenever he passed before Her or spoke to Her alone he resolved to genuflect with great reverence. He would not allow Her to serve him, or wait upon him, or perform any other humble services such as cleaning the house or washing the dishes and the like. All these things the most happy spouse desired to do himself in order not to derogate from the dignity of the Queen.

419. But the heavenly Lady, who among the humble was the most humble, and whom no one could surpass in humility, so managed all these things that the palm of victory in all these virtues always remained with Her. She besought St. Joseph not to bend the knee to Her, for though this worship was due to the Lord whom She carried in her womb, yet as long as He was within, unseen by anyone, no external distinction could be made in that action between the person of Christ and her own. The Saint therefore allowed himself to be persuaded and conformed to the desires of the Queen of heaven, and only when She did not perceive it did he give this worship to the Lord whom She carried in her womb and to Her as his Mother as was due to each respectively. In regard to the other works and services a humble contention arose between them, for St. Joseph could not overcome his conviction regarding the impropriety of allowing the great Queen and Lady to perform them, and therefore he sought to be beforehand with such household duties. His heavenly Spouse was filled with the same eagerness to seize upon occasions in advance of St. Joseph; however, since he busied himself in these duties during the time which She spent in contemplation, he frustrated her continual desire of serving him and performing all the duties of the household which She considered as belonging to Her as a servant. Hence in her affliction the heavenly Lady turned to the Lord with humble complaints, beseeching Him to oblige St. Joseph not to hinder Her in the exercise of humility as She desired. Since this virtue is so powerful before the divine tribunal and has free access, no prayer accompanied by it is small. Humility makes all prayers effective, and inclines the immutable being of God to clemency. He heard her petition and ordered the Guardian Angel of the blessed spouse to speak to him interiorly, and he spoke to him as follows: "Do not frustrate her humble desires, for She is superior to all creatures in heaven and earth. Exteriorly allow Her to serve thee, and interiorly treat Her with the highest reverence, and at all times and in all places worship the incarnate Word. It is his will, along with that of his divine Mother, to serve and not to be served (Mt. 20:28), in order to teach the world the knowledge of life and the excellence of humility (Mt. 11:29). In some of the work thou mayest assist Her, but always reverence in Her the Lord of all creation."

420. Instructed by this command of the Most High, St. Joseph permitted the heavenly Princess to exercise her humility, and so both of them were enabled to make an offering of their will to

God, most holy Mary by exercising the deepest humility and obedience toward her spouse in all her acts of virtue which She performed without failing in the least point of perfection, and St. Joseph by obeying the Almighty with a prudent and holy humiliation which was occasioned by seeing himself waited upon and served by Her whom he recognized as his Lady and that of all creation, and as the Mother of his God and Creator. In this manner the prudent Saint made up for the humility which he could not practice in the works now consigned to his Spouse, since this arrangement humiliated him more and obliged him to lower himself with greater reverential fear. In this fear he observed most holy Mary, always bearing in mind the Treasure of her virginal womb and adoring, magnifying and praising the Lord. A few times, in reward of his sanctity and reverence, or for the increase of both, the infant God manifested Himself to him in a wonderful manner: He saw Him in the womb of his purest Mother enclosed as it were in the clearest crystal. The sovereign Queen conversed with the glorious Saint concerning the Incarnation because She did not need to be so reserved in her heavenly words since he had been enlightened and instructed in the sublime sacraments of the hypostatic union of the divine and human natures in the virginal chamber of his Spouse.

421. No human tongue can reproduce the celestial words and conversations of most holy Mary and blessed St. Joseph; I shall adduce some of them in the following chapters as far as I know how. Yet who can declare the effects wrought in the sweet and devout heart of this Saint in seeing himself not only constituted her spouse, She who was the true Mother of his Creator, but in finding himself also served by Her as if She was the humblest slave, while at the same time he beheld Her raised in sanctity and dignity above the highest Seraphim and inferior only to God? If the divine right hand enriched with blessings the house of Obededom for having sheltered for a few months the figurative ark of the Old Testament (I Par. 13:14), what blessings did He not shower upon St. Joseph, to whom He entrusted the true Ark and the Lawgiver himself enshrined in Her? Incomparable was the good fortune and happiness of this Saint! And this, not only because he had with him in his house the living and true Ark of the New Testament, the altar, the sacrifice, and the temple, all left in his charge, but also because he cared for them worthily and as a faithful servant, constituted by the Lord himself over his family to provide for all their necessities in the right time as a most faithful dispenser (Mt. 24:45). Let all nations and generations know him, bless him, and publish his praises, since the Most High has done with no other as He has with St. Joseph (Ps. 147:20). I, an unworthy and poor worm, in the light of such venerable sacraments, exalt and magnify this Lord God, confessing Him as holy, just, merciful, wise and admirable in the disposition of all his great works.

422. The humble yet blessed house of Joseph contained three rooms which occupied nearly all its space and formed the exclusive dwelling place of the two Spouses, for they kept neither a manservant nor a maidservant. In one of the rooms St. Joseph slept, and in another he worked and kept the tools of his trade of carpenter. The third was ordinarily occupied by the Queen of heaven and was also her sleeping room, and contained a couch made by the hands of St. Joseph. This arrangement they had observed from the beginning when they were espoused and went to their home. Before knowing the dignity of his Spouse and Lady, St. Joseph rarely went to see Her, for while She kept her retirement he was engaged in his work unless some affair made it absolutely necessary to consult Her. But after he was informed of his good fortune the holy man was more solicitous for her welfare, and in order to renew the joy of his heart he began to come often to the retreat of the sovereign Lady to visit Her and know her instructions. But he always approached Her with extreme humility and reverential fear, and before he spoke to Her he was careful to note in what She was engaged. Many times he saw Her in ecstasy raised from the earth

and resplendent with most brilliant light; at other times in the company of her Angels holding celestial conversation with them; and at other times he found Her prostrate upon the earth in the form of a cross, speaking to the Lord. Her most fortunate spouse was a participant in these favors. But whenever he found the great Lady in these occupations and postures he would presume no further than to look upon Her with profound reverence, and thereby he merited sometimes to hear the sweetest harmony of the celestial music with which the Angels regaled their Queen, and perceived a wonderful fragrance which comforted him and entirely filled him with jubilation and spiritual joy.

423. The two holy Spouses lived alone in their house, for as I have said they had no servants of any kind, not only because of their profound humility, but it was also more convenient in preventing any witnesses of such visible wonders which passed between them and which were not to be communicated to outsiders. Nor did the Princess of heaven leave her house unless for a very urgent cause in the service of God or her fellow men. Whenever anything was necessary She asked that fortunate neighbor who as I have said had served St. Joseph during the absence of Mary in the house of Zacharias (227). This woman received such a good return that not only she herself became most holy and perfect, but her whole household and family was blessed by the help of the Queen and Lady of the world. She was visited by most holy Mary in some of her sicknesses, and with her family was copiously enriched by the blessings of heaven.

424. Never did St. Joseph see his heavenly Spouse asleep, nor did he of his own experience know whether She ever slept, though he besought Her to take some rest, especially during the time of her sacred pregnancy. The resting place of the Princess was the low couch which I said had been constructed by St. Joseph, and on it were the coverings which served Her during her brief and holy sleep. Her undergarment was a sort of tunic made of cotton, but softer than the ordinary or common cloth. This tunic She never changed from the time since She left the temple, nor did it wear out or grow old or soiled, and no person ever saw it, nor did St. Joseph know She wore that kind of garment, for he never saw any other part of her clothing except the outside garments which were open to the view of other persons. These were of a gray color as I have said (*Con.* 400), and along with her head coverings they were the only garments which the Queen changed now and then, not because they were soiled but because being visible to all She desired to avoid notice by such strange sameness of outward appearance. Nothing She wore upon her most pure and virginal body became soiled or worn, for She neither perspired, nor was She subject to the punishments which are laid upon the sin-impregnated bodies of the children of Adam. She was in all respects most pure, and the works of her hands were of highest adornment and cleanliness, and with the same purity She cared for the clothes and other necessities of St. Joseph. The food of which She partook was most limited in kind and quantity, but She partook of some every day and in the company of her spouse. She never ate meat, although he did, and She prepared it for him. Her sustenance was fruit, fish, ordinary bread, and cooked herbs, but of all these She partook in exact measure and weight, only so much as was necessary for the nourishment of the body and the maintenance of natural warmth without any superfluities that could pass over into excess of harmful corruption, and the same rule She observed in regard to drink, although Her most fervent acts resulted in a certain preternatural ardor. This rule regarding the quantity of her nourishment She followed during her whole life, though regarding the kind of food She adapted Herself to the various circumstances when they demanded a change, as I shall relate further on (*Tran.* 327, 398, etc.).

425. In all things most pure Mary exhibited consummate perfection, without deficiency in any grace, and all her actions both in the natural and the supernatural order reached the pinnacle of

excellence; yet my words fail to explain it, because I am never satisfied in this regard, seeing how far they fall short of that which I know, and how much more excellence this sublime creature possesses than I can express. Continually I am grieved by my insufficiency and dissatisfied with my limited terms and descriptions, fearing lest I presume more than I should in striving to do that which so far exceeds my powers. But the force of obedience inspires me with I do not know what sweet strength, which dispels my hesitancy and impels my backwardness, encouraging me to face the greatness of my undertaking and the smallness of my ability. I work under obedience, and through it I hope to make great gains; it shall also serve me as an excuse.

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

426. My daughter, in the school of humility which my whole life gives thee I desire thee to be studious and diligent, and this must be thy first and principal care if thou dost desire to enjoy the sweet embraces of the Lord, assure thyself of his favor, and possess the treasures of light which are hidden to the proud (Mt. 11:25), for without the trusty foundation of humility such treasures cannot be confided to any man. Let all thy ambition be to humble thyself in thy own estimation and thought, so in thy exterior actions thou mayest truly exhibit this humility of thy interior. It must be a subject of confusion and a spur of humility for thee and for all souls who have the Lord as their Father and Spouse to see how much greater are presumption and pride in the children of worldly wisdom than humility and true self-knowledge in the children of light. Consider the watchfulness, the untiring study, and the care of ambitious and aspiring men. Look at their rivalries to be esteemed in the world and their strivings never at rest, though so vain and worthless; how they conduct themselves outwardly according to the false notions they have of themselves; how they pretend to be what they are not, and how they exert themselves to obtain through these false pretenses the treasures which, though only earthly, they do not deserve. Hence it should be a cause of confusion and shame to the good that deceit urges on the sons of perdition with greater force than truth urges the elect;* that the number of those who in the world are anxious to strive in the service of their God and Creator is so small in comparison with the number of those who serve vanity; and whereas all are called to eternal life,[†] few are chosen (Mt. 20:16).

427. Seek therefore, my daughter, to make progress in this science of humility and gain for thyself the palm of victory in this virtue in the midst of the children of darkness. In opposition to their pride study what I did in order to overcome darkness in this world by the pursuit of humility. In this the Lord and I desire thee to be very wise and proficient. Never miss an occasion of exercising humility, and allow no one to deprive thee of such works; and if occasions of humility fail thee and are scarce, seek after them and ask God to send them to thee, for it pleases His Majesty to see such kind of solicitude and competition in what He desires so much. For the sake of this divine complacency alone thou, as a daughter of his house, as his domestic and his spouse, must be solicitous and anxious for acts of humility, for in this human ambition itself will teach thee not to be negligent. Observe how a woman in her house and family conducts herself in order to benefit and advance her family, and how she loses no chance of advancing it; nothing seems too much for her, and if anything, no matter how small it is, goes to loss she becomes much excited (Lk. 15:8). All this is the effect of worldly covetousness, and there is

* cf. Lk. 16:8 [Ed.]

† cf. Jn. 1:9; I Tim. 2:4 [Ed.]

certainly no reason why the wisdom of heaven should be more sterile due to the negligence of the recipient. Therefore I desire thee to allow no carelessness or forgetfulness concerning what concerns thee so much, and to lose no occasion of practicing humility and laboring for the glory of the Lord, but seek and strive after his gifts and draw merits from them as a faithful daughter and spouse. Then shalt thou find grace in the eyes of the Lord and in mine according to thy desire.