

CHAPTER XIV

The Infant God is Circumcised, and He is Given the Name of JESUS.

530. Like other towns of Israel the city of Bethlehem had its own synagogue where the people came together to pray (wherefore it was also called the house of prayer) and to hear the law of Moses. This was read and explained by a priest from the pulpit in a loud voice so the people could understand its precepts. But in these synagogues no sacrifices were offered; this was reserved for the temple of Jerusalem, except when the Lord commanded otherwise, and was not left to the choice of the people in order to avoid the danger of idolatry as is mentioned in Deuteronomy (12:5-6). But the priest, who was the teacher or minister of the law in those places, was usually also charged with administering circumcision; not that this was a binding law, for not only priests but anyone could perform it, but because the pious mothers firmly believed the infants would run less danger in being circumcised by the hands of a priest. Our great Queen, not because of any apprehension of danger but due to the dignity of the Child, also desired a priest to administer this rite to Him, and thus She sent her happy spouse St. Joseph to Bethlehem to call the priest of that town.

531. The priest came to the portal or cave of the Nativity where the incarnate Word, resting in the arms of his Virgin Mother, awaited him. With the priest came also two other officials who were to render such assistance as was customary at the performance of the rite. The rudeness of the dwelling at first astonished and somewhat disconcerted the priest, but the most prudent Queen spoke to him and welcomed him with such modesty and grace that his apprehension soon changed into devotion and admiration at the composure and most noble majesty of the Mother, and without knowing the cause he was moved to reverence and esteem for such an unusual personage. When the priest looked upon the countenance of the Mother and of the Child in her arms he was filled with great devotion and tenderness, wondering at the contrast exhibited amid such poverty and in a place so lowly and despised; and when he proceeded to touch the divine flesh of the Infant he was renovated by a secret influence which sanctified and perfected him, giving him a new existence in grace and raising him up to a state of holiness very pleasing to the most high Lord.

532. In order to show as much exterior reverence for the sacred rite of circumcision as was possible in that place, St. Joseph lighted two wax candles. The priest requested the Virgin Mother to consign the Child to the arms of the two assistants and withdraw for a little while in order not to be obliged to witness the sacrifice. This command caused some hesitation in the great Lady, for her humility and spirit of obedience inclined Her to obey the priest, while on the other hand She was withheld by the love and reverence for her Onlybegotten. In order not to fail against either of these virtues She humbly requested to be allowed to remain, saying She desired to be present at the performance of this rite since She held it in great esteem, and would have courage to hold her Son in her arms since She did not desire to leave Him alone on such an occasion; all She would ask is for the circumcision to be performed with as much tenderness as possible due to the delicacy of the Child. The priest promised to fulfill her request, and permitted the Child to be held in the arms of his Mother for fulfilling the mystery. Thus She became the sacred altar upon which the truths typified in the ancient sacrifice became a reality (Heb. 9:6), and She herself offered up this new morning sacrifice on her arms so all these particulars would be acceptable to the eternal Father.

533. The divine Mother then unwound the swaddling clothes in which her most holy Son was wrapped and drew from her bosom a towel or linen cloth which She had previously placed there for the purpose of warming it, for the weather was very cold on that day. While holding the Child in her hands She so placed this towel that the relics and the blood of the Circumcision would fall upon it. The priest thereupon proceeded to his duty and circumcised the Child, true God and true man. At the same time the Son of God, with immeasurable love, offered up to the eternal Father three sacrifices of such great value that each one would have been sufficient for the Redemption of a thousand worlds. The first was that He, being innocent and the Son of the true God, assumed the condition of a sinner (Philip. 2:7) by subjecting Himself to a rite instituted as a remedy for original sin, and to a law not binding on Him (II Cor. 5:21). The second was his willingness to suffer the pains of circumcision, which He felt as a true and perfect man. The third was the most ardent love with which He began to shed his blood for the human race, giving thanks to the eternal Father for having given Him a human nature capable of suffering for his exaltation and glory.

534. This prayerful sacrifice of JESUS our Good was accepted by the Father, and according to our way of speaking He began to declare Himself satisfied and paid for the indebtedness of humanity. The incarnate Word offered these first fruits of his blood as pledges that He would give it all in order to consummate the Redemption and extinguish the debt of the sons of Adam (Col. 2:14). All these interior acts and movements of the Onlybegotten his most holy Mother looked upon in his soul, and in her heavenly wisdom She penetrated the mystery of this sacrament, acting as his Mother and in concert with her Son and Lord in all He was doing and suffering. True to his human nature the divine Infant shed tears as other children; and though the pains caused by the wounding were most severe because of the delicacy of his body and the coarseness of the knife, which was made of flint, yet his tears were caused not so much by sensible pain as by supernatural sorrow caused by his knowledge of the hard-heartedness of mortals, for this was more rude and unyielding than the flint, resisting his sweetest love and the divine fire He had come to enkindle in the world and in the hearts of the faithful (Lk. 12:49). The tender and affectionate Mother also wept, like the guileless sheep which raises its voice in unison with the innocent lamb. In reciprocal love and compassion the Child clung to his Mother, while She sweetly caressed Him at her virginal breast and caught the sacred relics and the falling blood in the towel; these She entrusted to St. Joseph in order to tend to the divine Infant and wrap Him once more in the swaddling clothes. The priest was somewhat surprised at the tears of the Mother; yet, not understanding the mystery, he conjectured the beauty of the Child could well cause such deep and loving sorrow in Her who had given Him birth.

535. In all these proceedings the Queen of heaven was so prudent, circumspect and magnanimous that She caused admiration in the angelic choirs and highest delight to her Creator. She gave forth the effulgence of the divine wisdom which filled Her, performing each of her actions as perfectly as if She had that alone to perform. She was unyielding in her desire of holding the Child in her arms during the Circumcision; most careful in preserving the relics; compassionate in suffering and weeping with Him, feeling his pain; loving in caressing Him; diligent in pleasing Him; fervent in imitating Him in his works; and always pious in treating Him with the highest reverence, without ever failing or interrupting her acts of virtue, and without ever letting the attention and perfection due to one virtue hinder that of another. Admirable spectacle exhibited by a Maiden of fifteen years, and giving the Angels quite a new lesson and cause of admiration! Amid all this the priest asked the parents what name they wished to give to the Child in circumcision. The great Lady, always attentive to honor her spouse, asked St. Joseph

to mention the Name. St. Joseph turned toward Her in like reverence and gave Her to understand that he thought it proper this sweet Name should first flow from her mouth. Therefore, by divine disposition, both Mary and Joseph said at the same time: "JESUS is his Name" (Lk. 2:21). The priest answered: "The parents are unanimously agreed, and great is the Name which they give to the Child." Thereupon he inscribed it in the tablet or register of names of the rest of the children. While writing it the priest felt great interior movements, shedding copious tears, and in admiration at what he felt, yet being unaware of its cause, he said: "I am convinced this Child is to be a great Prophet of the Lord. Have great care in raising Him, and tell me in what I can relieve your needs." Most holy Mary and Joseph answered the priest with humble gratitude and dismissed him after offering him the gift of some candles and other articles.

536. Being again left alone with the Child, most holy Mary and Joseph celebrated anew the mystery of the Circumcision, commenting on the Holy Name of JESUS amid sweet canticles and tears of joy, the fuller knowledge of which (as also of other mysteries which I have mentioned) is reserved as an additional accidental glory for the saints in heaven. The most prudent Mother applied to the wound caused by the knife such medicines as were customary on such occasions for other children, and during the time while the pain and the healing lasted She would not for a moment part with Him, holding Him in her arms day and night. The tender love of the heavenly Mother is beyond all comprehension or understanding of man, for her natural love was greater than any other mother was capable of, and her supernatural love exceeded that of all the angels and saints together. Her reverence and worship cannot be compared with that of any other created being. These were the delights of the incarnate Word which He desired and longed for among the children of men (Prov. 8:31), and this was the recompense which his loving Heart drew from the exceeding sanctity of the Virgin Mother for the sorrows occasioned Him by their behavior. Although He pleased Himself in Her alone above all mortals, and found in Her full satisfaction of his love, yet the humble Queen sought to alleviate his bodily pains by all the means within her power; She therefore besought the holy Angels to assist Her and produce sweet harmony for their incarnate God and her suffering Child. The ministers of the Most High obeyed their Queen and Lady, and in audible voices they rehearsed the canticles which She herself had composed with her spouse in praise of the new and sweet Name of JESUS.

537. With this music, so sweet that in comparison to it all human music seemed but offensive cacophony, the heavenly Lady entertained her most holy Son. And sweeter yet was the harmony of her heroic virtues, which in her most holy soul formed choirs of armies, as the Lord and Spouse himself says in the Canticles (7:1). Hard are human hearts, and more than slow and dull in recognizing and gratefully acknowledging such venerable sacraments, instituted for their eternal salvation by the immense love of the Creator and Redeemer. O my sweet Good and life of my soul, what wicked return do we make for the exquisite artifices of thy eternal love! O measureless charity, which is not extinguished by the overwhelming waters of our gross and faithless ingratitude (Ib. 8:7)! He who is essential goodness and sanctity could not lower Himself more for love of us, nor exercise more exquisite love, than to assume the form of a sinner (Philip. 2:7), drawing upon his own innocence the punishment of sin which otherwise could never approach Him. If men despise such an example and forget such a benefit, how can they be said to retain the use of their reason? How can they presume upon and glory in their wisdom, prudence or judgment? It would be prudence, ungrateful man, if thou wouldst afflict thyself and weep over thy notorious dullness and darkness of mind in not being moved by such great works of thy God, since not even the divine love can melt the iciness of thy heart.

INSTRUCTION GIVEN TO ME BY THE QUEEN, MOST HOLY MARY, OUR LADY.

538. My daughter, I desire thee to consider attentively the blessed favor conferred upon thee by being informed of the solicitous care and attention which I lavished upon my most holy and sweet Son in the mysteries just now described. The Most High does not give thee this special light only in order to be regaled by the knowledge of these mysteries, but in order to imitate me in all these things as a faithful handmaid and distinguish thyself in rendering gratitude for his works in the same measure as thou art distinguished in knowing them more fully.* Consider then, dearest, how poorly paid is the love of my Son and Lord for mortals, and how forgetful of gratitude even his faithful continue to be. Assume it as thy task, as far as thy weak powers allow, to render satisfaction for this grievous offense, loving Him, thanking Him, and serving Him with all thy powers for all the other men who fail to do so. For this thou must be an angel in promptitude, most fervent in zeal, punctual on all occasions, and in all respects thou must die to all earthly things, freeing thyself and shattering the prisons of the human inclinations in order to lift thyself up in flight whither the Lord calls thee.

539. Thou art not ignorant of the sweet efficacy contained in the memory of the works performed by my most holy Son, and although thou canst so copiously avail thyself of the light given thee to be grateful, yet in order for thee to fear so much the more the danger of forgetfulness I particularly inform thee that the saints in heaven, comprehending by the divine light these mysteries, are astonished at themselves for not having paid more attention to them during their life; and if they were capable of pain they would be deeply grieved for their tardiness and carelessness in not having set proper value upon the works of the Redemption, and for failing in the imitation of Christ. All the angels and saints, by an insight hidden to mortals, wonder at the cruelty of human hearts against themselves and against Christ their Redeemer. Men have compassion neither for the sufferings of the Lord, nor for the sufferings they themselves stand in danger of incurring. When the foreknown in unending bitterness shall recognize their dreadful forgetfulness and indifference to the works of Christ their Savior, their confusion and despair shall be an intolerable punishment, and it alone shall be a chastisement beyond all imagination, for they shall then see the copiousness of the Redemption which they have despised (Ps. 129:7). Hear me, my daughter, and bend thy ears to these counsels and doctrines of eternal life (Ps. 44:11). Cast out from thy faculties every image and affection toward human creatures, and turn all the powers of thy heart and soul toward the mysteries and blessings of the Redemption. Occupy thyself wholly with them,[†] ponder and weigh them, and give thanks for them as if thou alone wert in existence and as if they had been wrought solely for thee and singly for each human being in particular (Gal. 2:20). In these mysteries and blessings thou shalt find life, the truth, and the way of eternity. Following Him thou canst not err, but shalt find before thee *the light of the eyes and peace* (Bar. 3:14).

* cf. Lk. 12:48 [Ed.]

† cf. I Tim. 4:15 [Ed.]