

CHAPTER XIX

Mary Most Holy and St. Joseph Depart with the Infant Jesus from Bethlehem to Jerusalem in order to Present Him in the Temple and Comply with the Law.

585. Already the forty days after the birth of a son, during which a woman according to the law was considered unclean and obliged to continue her purification for her readmission into the temple (Lv. 12:2-4), were coming to a close. In order to comply with this law and satisfy another obligation contained in Exodus (13:12), which demanded the sanctification and presentation to the Lord of all the firstborn sons, the Mother of purity itself prepared to go to Jerusalem where She was to appear in the temple with her Son as the Onlybegotten of the eternal Father and purify Herself according to the custom of other women. She had no doubt about complying with that part of the law which applied to Herself in common with other mothers. Not that She was ignorant of her own innocence and purity, for She knew this ever since the Incarnation of the Word, and that She had not contracted the common original sin; nor was She ignorant of the fact that She had conceived by the Holy Ghost and brought forth without labor, remaining ever Virgin and more pure than the sun (Lk. 1:35). Yet She did not hesitate to subject Herself to the common law; on the contrary, in the ardent longing of her Heart for humiliation and annihilation to the dust, She desired to do this of her own free will.

586. In regard to the Presentation of her most holy Son there was some occasion for the same doubt as in regard to the Circumcision, for She knew Him as true God, superior to the laws which He himself had made. Yet She was informed of the will of the Lord by divine light and by the interior acts of the most holy soul of the incarnate Word, for She saw his desire of sacrificing Himself and offering Himself as a living Victim (Eph. 5:2) to the eternal Father in thanksgiving for having formed his most pure body and created his most holy soul, and for having destined Him as an acceptable sacrifice for the human race and for the welfare of mortals. These acts of the most sacred humanity of the Word were continual, conforming Himself to the divine will not only insofar as He was already beatified, but also insofar as He was still a wayfarer upon earth and our Redeemer. But in addition to these interior acts, and in obedience to the law, He desired to be offered to the eternal Father in the temple, where all adored and magnified Him as in a house of prayer, expiation and sacrifice (Dt. 12:5-6).

587. The great Lady conferred about the journey with her spouse, and having resolved to be in Jerusalem on the very day appointed by the law, and having made the necessary preparations, they took leave of the good woman who had so devotedly given them hospitality. Although this woman was left in ignorance of the mystery of her heavenly guests, she was filled with the blessings of heaven which brought her abundant fruit. They then went to visit the grotto or cave of the Nativity, not desiring to begin their journey without once more venerating that sanctuary so humble and yet so rich in happiness, though at that time this was yet unknown to the world. The Mother gave the infant Jesus to St. Joseph in order to prostrate Herself to the earth and venerate the ground which had been witness to such venerable mysteries. Having done this with incomparable devotion and tenderness She said to her spouse: "My master, give me thy blessing for this journey as thou didst always give upon departing from thy home. I beseech thee also to allow me to perform this journey on foot and discalced, since I am to bear in my arms the Victim who is to be offered to the eternal Father. This is a mysterious work, and as far as possible I desire to perform it with the conditions and decorum for which I ask." Our Queen was accustomed for the sake of decency to wear shoes which covered her feet and served as a sort of

stocking. They were made of a certain plant used by the poor and something like hemp or mallow, dried and woven into a coarse and strong texture which, although poor, was clean and of decent appearance.

588. St. Joseph responded by bidding Her arise, for She was kneeling before him, and he said: "May the most high Son of the eternal Father, whom I hold in my arms, give Thee his blessing. Be also congratulated for carrying Him on foot to the temple in thy arms. Yet Thou must not go barefoot since the weather does not permit it, and thy desire shall be acceptable before the Lord instead of the deed." Thus St. Joseph used his authority to command as head of the Holy Family, though with great respect, in order not to deprive most holy Mary of the joy of humiliation and obedience; and since he only obeyed Her, humbling and mortifying himself in commanding Her, it happened that both of them exercised humility and obedience reciprocally. That he refused Her permission to go barefoot to Jerusalem was occasioned by his apprehensions lest the cold injure her health, for he did not know the wonderful qualities and composition of her virginal and perfect body, nor the other privileges conferred upon Her by the divine right hand. The obedient Queen made no reply to the orders of her holy spouse and obeyed his wish not to go unshod. In order to again receive in her arms the infant Jesus She prostrated Herself on the earth, thanking Him and adoring Him for the blessings which He had wrought for them and for the whole human race in that cave. She besought His Majesty to preserve this sanctuary, and that among Catholics it always be revered, esteemed and venerated; and She reiterated the commission and entrusting of the cave to the holy Angel appointed to guard it. She covered Herself with a cloak for the journey, and receiving in her arms Jesus, the Treasure of heaven, She pressed Him to her bosom, tenderly shielding Him from the inclemency of the wintry weather.

589. They departed from the cave, asking the blessing of the infant God, which His Majesty gave to them in a visible manner. St. Joseph placed upon the little donkey the chest containing the clothes of the divine Infant, along with the part of the gifts of the Kings reserved for offering to the temple. Thus began the most solemn procession which was ever held from Bethlehem to the temple in Jerusalem, for in company with Jesus, the Prince of the eternities, his Mother the Queen, and St. Joseph her spouse, journeyed the ten thousand Angels who had assisted at these mysteries, and the other legions which had brought from heaven the sweet and holy Name of Jesus at the Circumcision (523). All these heavenly courtiers passed along in visible human forms, so beautiful and shining that in comparison with them all that is delightful or precious in the world is less than dirt or mud compared to the finest and purest gold. In their splendor the sun, even in its brightest light, was obscured, and the night turned into brightest day. The heavenly Queen and her spouse St. Joseph rejoiced in seeing them, while all of them together celebrated this mystery with new canticles of praise of the infant God about to be presented in the temple. In this manner they journeyed the two leagues from Bethlehem to Jerusalem.

590. On this occasion, not without divine dispensation, the weather was unusually severe, and thus without regard for the tender Child its Creator the cold and sleety blasts pierced to his shivering limbs and caused the divine Infant to weep as He rested in the arms of his loving Mother, his Heart being more wounded by compassion and love for men than his body was by the inclemency of the weather. The powerful Empress turned to the winds and elements and as their Lady reprehended them with heavenly indignation because they caused suffering to their own Maker. She commanded them to moderate their rigor toward the Child but not toward Her. The elements obeyed the commands of their true and rightful Mistress; the cold blasts were changed into a soft and balmy air for the Infant without diminishing their inclemency toward the Mother. Thus She herself felt it but not her Infant, as on other occasions already mentioned and

yet to be mentioned (20-21, 543-4, 633). She addressed also sin, which She had not contracted, and said: “O sin, thou art disorderly and completely inhuman, since for thy remedy it is necessary for the Creator of all things Himself to be afflicted by the very creatures He has made and preserves in being! Thou art a terrible and horrible monster, offensive to God and destructive of creatures; thou turnest them into abominations and dost deprive them of their greatest happiness, that of being friends of God. *O ye sons of men! How long will you be dull of heart? Why do you love vanity, and seek after lying?*”^{*} Be not so ungrateful toward the most high God and so cruel to yourselves. Open your eyes and see your danger. Do not despise the precepts of your heavenly Father, nor forget the instruction of your Mother (Prov. 1:8) who has brought you forth by charity, for the Onlybegotten of the Father, by taking human flesh in my womb, has made me the Mother of all nature. As such I love you, and if it were possible and according to the will of the Most High that I suffer all the punishments visited upon you from the time of Adam until now, I would accept them with pleasure for thy salvation.”

591. During the journey of our Lady with the infant God it happened in Jerusalem that the high priest Simeon was enlightened by the Holy Ghost concerning the coming of the incarnate Word and his Presentation in the temple on the arms of his Mother. The same revelation was given to the holy widow Anna, and she was also informed of the poverty and suffering of St. Joseph and the most pure Lady on their way to Jerusalem. These two Saints, immediately conferring with each other about their revelations and enlightenments, called the steward of the temple, who had care of temporal affairs, and giving him the signs whereby to recognize the travelers who were coming they ordered him to proceed to the gate leading out to Bethlehem and receive them into his house with all benevolence and hospitality. This the steward did, and thus the Queen and her spouse were much consoled due to the care they had regarding finding a decent lodging for their divine Infant. Leaving them well provided in his house, the fortunate host returned in order to report to the high priest.

592. That evening before they retired most holy Mary and St. Joseph conferred with each other about what they were to do. The most prudent Lady reminded him that it was better to bring the gifts of the Kings on that same evening to the temple in order to be able to make the offering in silence and without noisy demonstration, as was proper with all donations and sacrifices,[†] and on the way he could procure the two turtledoves which on the morrow were to be the public offering for the infant Jesus (Lk. 2:24). St. Joseph complied with her request. As a stranger and one little known he gave the gold, frankincense and myrrh to the one who usually received such gifts for the temple, but St. Joseph took care not to reveal himself to anyone as the one who had offered such great alms. Although he could have bought the lamb which the rich usually offered for their firstborn (Lv. 12:6), he chose not to do so because the humble and poor apparel of the Mother and the Child, as well as the spouse, would not have agreed with a public offering as valuable as that of the rich (Mt. 8:20). The Mother of Wisdom deemed it unbecoming to depart from poverty and humility in any action, even for a pious and honest end, because in all things She was the Teacher of perfection and her most holy Son the Teacher of holy poverty in which He was born, lived and died.

593. Simeon, as St. Luke tells us (Lk. 2:25), was a just and God-fearing man, and was hoping for the consolation of Israel. The Holy Ghost, who dwelt in him, had revealed to him *that he should not see death before he had seen the Christ of the Lord* (Ib. 26). Moved by the Holy

* cf. Ps. 4:3 [Ed.]

† cf. Mt. 6:2 [Ed.]

Ghost he came to the temple, for during that night, besides the revelations he had already received, he was again divinely enlightened and made to understand more clearly the mysteries of the Incarnation and Redemption of man, the fulfillment of the prophecies of Isaias that a Virgin would conceive and bear a Son (Is. 7:14), and from the root of Jesse a flower would rise up, namely Christ (Ib. 11:1), and likewise all the rest contained in these and other prophecies. He received a clear understanding of the hypostatic union of the two natures in the Person of the Word, and of the mysteries of the Passion and Death of the Redeemer. With the understanding of such exalted matters holy Simeon was elevated and entirely inflamed with the desire of seeing the Redeemer of the world; and the following day, having now been given notice that Christ was coming to present Himself to the Father, he was carried in spirit to the temple (Lk. 2:27), this being the force of this divine light. What then happened I shall relate in the following chapter. Also the holy matron Anna received revelation during the same night concerning many of these mysteries, and great was the joy of her spirit; for as I have said in the first Part of this History, she had been the teacher of our Queen during her stay in the temple (*Con.* 422). The Evangelist tells us she never left the temple grounds, serving in it day and night in prayer and fasting, and that she was a prophetess, daughter of Samuel, of the tribe of Aser (Lk. 2:36-38), who having lived seven years with her husband and was now eighty-four years old. As shall be seen, she spoke prophetically of the infant God.

INSTRUCTION WHICH THE QUEEN OF HEAVEN GAVE ME.

594. My daughter, one of the misfortunes which deprives souls of happiness, or at least diminishes it, is they content themselves with performing good works negligently and without fervor, as if they were engaged in a matter of little importance or merely by accident. Because of this ignorance and vileness of heart few of them arrive at the intimate conversation and friendship with the Lord, which they can attain only by fervent love. This is called fervent precisely because of its similarity to boiling water, for just as water is made to boil and foam by the fire, so the soul, by the sweet violence of the divine conflagration of love, is raised above itself and above all created things, as well as above its own doings. In loving it is more and more inflamed, and from this very love springs an unquenchable affection which makes the soul despise and forget all earthly things, being neither satisfied nor satiated with all earthly goods. And since the human heart, when it does not attain what it dearly loves, if that attainment is possible, is inflamed with ever greater desire of reaching it by other means, therefore if the soul possesses fervent charity it shall always find more to desire and do for the sake of the Beloved, and all it does will seem to it little. Thus it shall seek and pass from a good will to a perfect will,* and from this to the greater approbation of the Lord, until it arrives at the most perfect and intimate union and transformation in God himself.

595. Hence thou shalt understand, my dearest, why I desired to go barefooted to the temple, carrying at the same time my most holy Son in order to present Him there, and why I also desired to comply with the law of purification; for to my works I gave all possible plenitude of perfection by the force of love which always demanded what was most perfect and agreeable to the Lord, and which moved me to this most fervent longing to perform all the virtues to the height of perfection. Labor to imitate me with all diligence in all that I did, for I assure thee, my friend, that it is this exercise of thy love which the Most High is desiring and expecting of thee;

* cf. Lk. 8:15; Gospel, Sexagesima Sunday [Ed.]

and as is mentioned by the Spouse in the Canticles (Cant. 2:9), He is watching thee so close at hand that not more than a slight screen intervenes between the soul and its vision of the Lord. Conquered and enamored He pursues the souls who thus love and serve Him in all their works, while He withdraws from the lukewarm and negligent ones, or deals with them only according to the general rules of his divine Providence. Do thou aspire continually to the most perfect and pure in the virtues, and study and invent new schemes and projects of love so all the forces of thy interior and exterior faculties shall continue to be zealously occupied in what is most exalted and excellent in the service of the Lord; and communicate all these affections to thy master and spiritual father, subjecting them in obedience to his counsel in order to do what he commands, for this shall always be the most preferable and secure way.