

CHAPTER XVIII

Most Holy Mary and St. Joseph Distribute the Gifts Received from the Magi, and They Remain in Bethlehem until the Presentation of the Infant Jesus in the Temple.

573. After the departure of the three Kings and the due celebration of the great mystery of the adoration of the infant Jesus, there was nothing to wait for in that poor yet sacred place, and they were free to leave it. The most prudent Mother then said to St. Joseph: "My master and spouse, this offering which the Kings have left for our God and Child must not remain idle, but must serve His Majesty, being used for that which is according to his will and service. I deserve nothing, even of temporal goods; distribute all these gifts as belonging to my Son and to thee." The most faithful of husbands answered, with his accustomed humility and courtesy, that he would leave all to Her and would be pleased to see Her distribute them. But Her Majesty insisted anew and said: "Since thou makest an excuse of humility, my master, do it then out of charity for the poor, who need their share, since they have a right to the things which their heavenly Father has created for their sustenance." They therefore immediately concluded to divide the gifts into three parts, one destined for the temple of Jerusalem, namely the incense and myrrh, as well as part of the gold, another part as offering to the priest who had circumcised the Child so he could use it for himself and for the synagogue or place of prayer in Bethlehem, and the third part for distribution among the poor. This resolve they executed with generous and fervent affection.

574. The Almighty ordained that a poor, honorable and pious woman would provide the opportunity for them to leave the cave. She had come there a few times to see our Queen, since the house where she lived was built at the wall of the city, not far from that sacred cave. Some time later this devout woman, not being aware of what had happened, but having heard the rumor of the visit of the Kings, held a conversation with most holy Mary and asked Her whether She had heard that some Wise Men, who were said to be kings, had come from afar seeking the Messiah. The heavenly Princess, aware of the good disposition of this woman, took occasion to instruct her and catechize her in the common belief, without declaring in particular the hidden sacrament of the King (Tob. 12:7) whom She held in her arms. In order to relieve her poverty She gave her some of the gold destined for the poor. By these benefits the condition of this happy woman was much improved, and she became enthusiastically attached to her Teacher and Benefactress. She invited the Holy Family to live in her house, which being a poor one was greatly accommodated as a lodging for the founders and builders of holy poverty. The poor woman offered with great insistence, seeing the inconvenience of the cave where most holy Mary and her happy spouse resided with the Child. The Queen did not refuse her offer, and with esteem responded to the woman that She would advise her of their decision. She and St. Joseph conferred with each other, and they resolved to leave the cave and lodge in the house of this woman, awaiting there the time of the Purification and Presentation in the temple. They did this so much the more willingly since it provided an opportunity for them to remain near the cave of the Nativity, and also because many people began to frequent the cave due to the rumor of the visit of the Kings which had been spread about.

575. Because of these and other considerations most holy Mary with St. Joseph and the sacred Child took leave of the cave, though with most tender regret. They accepted the hospitality of that fortunate woman, who received them with the greatest charity and assigned to them the larger portion of her dwelling. The holy Angels and ministers of the Most High accompanied them in the same human form in which they always served them. And because the heavenly

Mother and her spouse went frequently from their new lodging to visit the Holy Place of that sanctuary of the cave, the Angels came and went with them as numerous courtiers delegated to their service; moreover, when the Child and his Mother took leave of the cave God appointed an Angel as its keeper and watcher as He had done with the garden of Paradise (Gen. 3:24). This guard remained and does remain to this day, sword in hand, at the opening of the cave, and never since then has an animal entered there. That this holy Angel does not hinder the entrance of hostile infidels, who have possession of this and other Holy Places, is because of the judgments of the Most High, who allows men to execute the designs of his wisdom and justice. This permission would not be necessary if Christian princes were filled with fervent zeal for the honor and glory of Christ, and would seek the restoration of these Holy Places consecrated by the blood and labors of the Lord and his most holy Mother, and by the works of our Redemption. And even if this would not be possible, there is no excuse for not attending with faithful diligence to the decent upkeep of these mysterious places, since nothing is impossible to the believer (Mk. 9:22), who can overcome mountains (Mt. 17:19). I was given to understand that the pious devotion and veneration for the Holy Land is one of the most powerful and efficacious means for establishing and confirming Catholic monarchies, and no one can deny that many of their excessive and unnecessary expenses could be avoided by employing their resources in such a pious enterprise, which would be pleasing both to God and to men, since justifying these expenses would entail no need of exotic reasons.

576. Most pure Mary and her spouse, having with her divine Child moved to the dwelling in the vicinity of the cave, remained there until according to the requirements of the law She was to present Herself with her Firstborn for purification in the temple. For this mystery the most holy among creatures determined to dispose Herself worthily by fervent desires of carrying her infant Jesus to present to the eternal Father in his temple, by imitating her Son, and by presenting Herself with the adornment and beauty of great works which would make her a worthy victim and offering for the Most High. With this intention the heavenly Lady, during the days which still remained until the Purification, performed such heroic acts of love and all the other virtues that neither the tongue of men nor of angels can explain them; hence how much less can this be done by a woman entirely useless and full of ignorance? Christian piety and devotion will merit to feel these mysteries if by contemplation and veneration they dispose themselves. Judging the more intelligible favors received by the Virgin Mother, they can infer and trace the others which do not fall within the scope of human words.

577. From his Nativity the infant Jesus spoke to his sweetest Mother in audible words, for immediately after his birth He said to Her: "Imitate Me, my Spouse, become like unto Me," as was mentioned in chapter X. And though He could always speak with most perfect pronunciation, in the first year He only spoke audibly to Her; the holy spouse Joseph never heard him speak until the Child grew and was one year old, after which He also spoke with him.* Nor did the heavenly Lady reveal this secret, for She understood it was only for Her. The words of the infant God were spoken with the majesty worthy of his greatness, with the efficacy of his infinite power, and as befitted the most pure and holy, the most wise and prudent of all creatures next to Himself, and one who was his true Mother. Sometimes He said: "My Dove, my Beloved, my dearest Mother" (Cant. 2:10; 7:6). By these colloquies and delights contained in the Canticles of Solomon, and other more continual interior conversations, the most holy Son and Mother passed their time, and in these the heavenly Princess received favors and was delighted by

* cf. Lk. 2:52 [Ed.]

caresses so sweet and loving as exceed those of the Canticles of Solomon, and greater than those which have been or shall be given to all the just and holy souls from the beginning until the end of the world. Many times during these loving mysteries the infant Jesus repeated those words: "Become like unto Me, my Mother and my Dove." Since they were words of life and infinite power, and most holy Mary at the same time was furnished with the infused knowledge of all the interior operations of the soul of her Onlybegotten, no tongue can declare nor thought comprehend the effects wrought in the most candid and inflamed Heart of the Mother of the Son who was God and man.

578. Among the more rare and excellent privileges of most pure Mary, the chief one is that She is Mother of God, which is the foundation of all the rest; the second is that She was conceived without sin; the third, that She enjoyed many times the beatific vision in this mortal life; and the fourth is that She continually and clearly saw the most holy soul of her Son and all its operations for her imitation. She had it present to her eyes as a most clear and pure mirror in which She could behold Herself again and again in order to adorn Herself with most precious gems of virtue, made in imitation of those seen in that most holy soul. There She saw it united with the divine Word, and She exercised her humility in seeing how much her own human nature was inferior to that of Christ. She perceived with the clearest insight the acts of gratitude and praise with which the soul of Christ praised the Most High for having been created out of nothing as the rest of the souls, for the graces and gifts with which it was endowed above others as a creature, and especially for having been raised and exalted in his human nature to the inseparable union with the Divinity. She pondered over his petitions, prayers and supplications to his eternal Father for the human race, and how in all his other activity He prepared Himself for its Redemption and instruction as the sole Redeemer and Teacher of man for eternal life.

579. All these works of the most holy humanity of Christ our supreme Good his most pure Mother continually sought to imitate. There is much to say concerning this great mystery of her imitation in this History, for She had this example and model incessantly before her eyes, and according to it She regulated her own activity and behavior during the Incarnation and Nativity of her Son. Like a busy bee She continually built up the sweetest honeycomb of delights for the incarnate Word. His Majesty, having come from heaven as our Redeemer and Teacher, desired his most holy Mother, from whom He had received human existence, to participate in a most exalted and singular manner in the fruits of the common Redemption, and be his unique and chosen Disciple in whom his teaching would be vividly stamped, and whom He wished to make as similar to Himself as possible. In the light of these intentions and blessed purposes of the incarnate Word must we judge the greatness of the works of his most holy Mother and the delights which He enjoyed while resting upon her arms and reclining upon her bosom, for it was indeed the bridal chamber and couch of this true Spouse (Cant. 1:15).

580. In the days when the most holy Queen remained in Bethlehem before the Purification some of the people came to see and speak with Her, though nearly all of them were of the most poor. Some of them came because of the alms which She distributed, and others because they had heard of the Kings who had visited the cave. All of them spoke of this visit and of the coming of the Redeemer, for in those days (not without divine predisposition) the belief that the birth of the Messiah was at hand was very widespread among the Jews and the talk of it was very frequent. This gave the most prudent Mother repeated occasions to exercise Herself in magnanimous works, not only by guarding the secret of her bosom and conferring within Herself about all She saw and heard (Lk. 2:19), but also by directing many souls toward the knowledge of God by confirming them in the faith, instructing them in the practice of virtues, enlightening

them in the mysteries of the Messiah whom they were expecting, and dispelling the great ignorance in which they were lived as unrefined people and incompetent regarding divine matters. Sometimes in these matters they spoke so many novelties and feminine stories that upon hearing them the holy and simple spouse Joseph smiled in secret, admiring the responses full of heavenly wisdom and efficacy with which the great Lady answered them and instructed them in all things; how She tolerated and bore with them, guiding them to the truth and knowledge of the light with profound humility and gentle seriousness, leaving them all happy, consoled, and capable of what was proper for them, since She spoke to them words of eternal life (Jn. 6:69) which penetrated, inflamed and strengthened their hearts.

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

581. My daughter, by the clear sight of the divine light I knew, above all creatures, the low value and esteem earthly gifts and riches have before the Most High. For this reason I was troubled, and embarrassed in my holy liberty, at finding myself responsible for the treasures of the Kings offered to my most holy Son. Yet since in all my works humility and obedience were to shine forth, I did not desire to appropriate them to myself, nor distribute them according to my own will, but by the will of my spouse Joseph. In this resignation I acted as if I was his servant, and as if none of those temporal goods concerned me; for it is repugnant, and for weak creatures very dangerous, to claim or seize for themselves any of the goods of the earth, likewise with wealth as with honor, since all this is done with covetousness, ambition, and vain ostentation.

582. I have desired, my dearest, to tell thee all this to instruct thee in all matters not to accept gifts or human honors as if they were due to thee, nor to claim them for thyself, especially if thou dost receive it from powerful and renowned persons. Preserve thy interior liberty, and make no ostentation of what is worth nothing, and which cannot justify thee before God. If anything is presented to thee, never say: This has been given to me, or this is brought to me, but this the Lord sends for the community, pray to His Majesty for the instrument of this his mercy; and name the giver, so they may pray for him in particular, and so he will not be disappointed in the purpose for which he gives the alms. Neither receive it by thy own hand, which implies covetousness, but rather the officials appointed for that purpose. And if by the office of superior (after being inside the convent) it is necessary to give it to whom it belongs for distribution to the community, let it be with the example of detachment, manifesting no affection for it; yet to the Most High and to the one who did you good thou must be grateful, knowing thou dost not deserve it. For what is brought to the other religious thou must acknowledge with gratitude as superior, and with all solicitude take care to immediately apply it to the whole community, without taking anything for thyself. Do not gaze with curiosity at what comes to the convent, lest thy senses be delighted, or be inclined to crave it or take pleasure in receiving such benefits; for thereby fragile nature, full of passions, repeatedly incurs many defects to which it gives little consideration. Nothing can be trusted to infected nature, since it always desires more than it has, and never says “enough”, and the more it receives the greater the thirst remains for more.

583. But what I desire thee to pay more attention to is the intimate and frequent communication with the Lord by unceasing love, praise and reverence. In this I desire thee, my daughter, to work with all thy strength, ceaselessly exerting thy faculties and powers with vigilance and care; for without this effort it is inevitable that the inferior part of thy nature, which oppresses the soul (Wis. 9:15), will cast it down and tyrannize it, distract and drive it impulsively, making it lose

the vision of the highest Good. This loving treatment by the Lord is so delicate that merely by paying attention or listening to the enemy in his fabrications the soul loses it. For this reason the enemy seeks with great diligence for souls to pay attention to him, knowing the punishment of having listened to him will be the concealment from the soul of the Object of its love (Cant. 5:6). Then when it carelessly ignores the beauty of the Lord, it wanders after the footsteps of its inattention (Ib. 1:7) and is deprived of the divine sweetness (Ib. 5:7). And when (in its dissatisfaction) it experiences this damage, and wishes to return to seek Him, it does not always find Him or is restored to Him (Ib. 3:1-2). Since the demon who deceived it then offers other delights so vile and unlike those to which the soul has been accustomed in its interior taste, this originates and results in new sadness, disturbance, dejection, lukewarmness and dissatisfaction, and everything is filled with confusion and danger.

584. Regarding this truth, my dearest, thou hast some experience due to thy negligences and tardiness in believing the benefits of the Lord. It is time for thee to be prudent in thy sincerity, and constant in preserving the fire of the sanctuary (Lv. 6:12), without losing for a moment the sight of that same Object to which I was always attentive with all the strength of my soul and faculties. And though there is a great distance from thee, who art a lowly wormlet, and what I propose for thy imitation of me, and thou cannot enjoy the true Good as directly as I held Him, nor act under the conditions I did, yet since I instruct thee and manifest to thee what I did in imitating my most holy Son thou canst, according to thy powers, imitate me, understanding thou dost see Him by another means. I saw Him in his most holy humanity, and thou canst see Him in my soul and person. If the Almighty calls and invites all men to this exalted perfection, if they desire to follow it (Mt. 11:28-29), consider what thou art obliged to do, since the right hand of the Most High has shown itself so long and powerful with thee in order to draw thee after Him (Cant. 1:3).