

CHAPTER XV

Most Holy Mary Remains with the Infant God in the Cave of the Nativity until the Coming of the Three Kings.

540. By the infused knowledge which our great Queen had of Holy Scriptures, and by most exalted and supernatural revelations, She knew the Magi Kings of the Orient would come to acknowledge and adore her most holy Son as their true God (Ps. 71:10; Is. 60:6). She was aware of it also more particularly because an Angel had been sent to them to announce the birth of the incarnate Word, as mentioned in chapter XI, number 492, all of which was known to the Virgin Mother. St. Joseph had no foreknowledge of these mysteries because they had not been revealed to him, nor had his most prudent Spouse informed him of this secret. In all things She was most wise and discreet, awaiting the sweet and timely dispositions of divine Providence (Wis. 8:1). Hence after the Circumcision the holy spouse proposed to the Lady of heaven that they leave their poor and forsaken habitation due to the insufficient shelter it provided for the infant God and for Her, for it would now be possible to find a lodging in Bethlehem where they could remain until after presenting the Child in the temple of Jerusalem. This proposal of the most faithful spouse arose from his care and solicitude lest the Child and his Mother lack even that comfort and convenience which it was possible for their poverty to procure, but he left it all to the will of his heavenly Spouse.

541. Without revealing the mystery the humble Queen answered: "My spouse and master, I submit myself in obedience to thee, and wherever it is thy will to go I shall follow with great pleasure; arrange it as it seems best to thee." The heavenly Lady had an affection for the cave because of its lowliness and poverty, and because the incarnate Word had consecrated it by the mysteries of his Nativity and Circumcision, and was to hallow it by the mystery of the visit of the Magi, though She did not know at what time that would happen. This was a most pious affection, full of devotion and reverence, yet She preferred to give an example of the highest perfection in all things. She considered it more important to resign and submit Herself to St. Joseph, letting her spouse decide what was to be done. While they were thus conferring with each other the Lord himself informed them through the two holy princes Michael and Gabriel, who were attending in corporeal forms to the service of their God and Lord and of their great Queen. They spoke to the Blessed Mother and St. Joseph, saying: "The divine will has ordained that three Kings of the earth, who are coming from the Orient in search of the King of heaven, shall adore the divine Word made man in this very place. They have already journeyed ten days, for at the hour of the holy Birth they were informed of it, and they immediately set out on their journey; they shall shortly arrive and fulfill the prophecies which the Prophets from very ancient times knew and foretold."

542. By this new information St. Joseph was made joyful and instructed regarding the will of the Lord, and his spouse most holy Mary said to him: "My master, this place chosen by the Most High for such magnificent mysteries, though it is poor and destitute in the eyes of the world, yet in the sight of his wisdom is rich and precious, the most estimable and preferable on earth, since the Lord of heaven is pleased with it, consecrating it by his true presence. He who is the true promised land is powerful to rejoice us in this place by the sight of Him. And if it is his will He shall give us some relief and shelter against the rigors of the weather during the few days in which we are to be here." St. Joseph was much consoled and encouraged by these words of the most prudent Queen. He answered Her that since the divine Child was to fulfill the law which

required Him to be presented in the temple, just as He had subjected Himself to the law of circumcision, they could remain in this sacred place until that day would arrive without first undertaking the distant and wearisome journey to Nazareth during inclement weather; however, if the severity of the season would compel them to seek shelter in the city, they could easily do so, since from Bethlehem to Jerusalem there was a distance of only two hours.

543. In all these matters most holy Mary conformed Herself to the will of her careful spouse, always convinced of his desire to protect that sacred tabernacle, more holy and venerable than the Holy of Holies in the temple, until the time would come for presenting in it her Onlybegotten, for whom She provided all the shelter possible by which to protect Him from the cold and rigors of the weather. She also prepared the cave for the arrival of the Kings, cleaning it once more and arranging it anew as far as the rudeness and destitution of the place allowed. But her greatest attention and care was always reserved for the Child himself, bearing Him in her arms continually unless necessity forced Her to relinquish Him. Above all this She used her power as Queen and Mistress of all creation when the inclemencies of winter raged on, commanding the cold and the winds, the snow and the ice not to harm their Creator, but rather to inflict their rigors and harsh influences upon Her alone. The heavenly Lady would say: "Restrain your wrath with your Creator, Author, Master and Preserver, who has given you existence, power and activity. Take notice, creatures of my Beloved, that you received your rigor because of sin for the purpose of chastising the disobedience of the first Adam and his progeny (Wis. 5:18). But with the second Adam, who comes to repair that fall and cannot have any part therein, you must be courteous, respecting and not offending Him to whom you owe service and subjection. Hence I command you in his name not to cause Him any discomfort or displeasure."

544. It is worthy of our admiration and imitation to notice the ready obedience of the irrational creatures to the divine will, intimated to them by the Mother of God, for upon her command the snow and rain approached no nearer than ten yards, the winds stopped short, and the surrounding air retained a mild temperature. To this miracle was added another one: At the same time in which the infant God in her arms received this homage of the elements and was feeling some shelter, the Virgin Mother felt and suffered the cold and inclemency of the weather as if it were exerting all its natural influences in that place. In this they obeyed the loving Mother and sovereign Mistress of creatures to the letter, since She did not desire to exempt Herself from their severity while She prevented her tender Child and her God from suffering because of it. To the holy and happy Joseph was extended the same privilege as the sweet Infant; he noticed the favorable change of temperature without knowing it was due to the commands of his heavenly Spouse and an effect of her power, for She had not manifested to him this privilege because She had no command to that effect from the Most High.

545. Regarding the order and manner in which the great Queen nourished her child Jesus, She offered Him her virginal milk three times a day, and always with such reverence that She asked his permission beforehand and his pardon for the indignity, considering Herself and acknowledging Herself unworthy of such a privilege. Many times while holding Him in her arms She was on her knees adoring Him, and if at any time it was necessary to seat Herself She always asked his permission. With the same tokens of reverence She gave Him to St. Joseph and received Him from his arms, as I have said above (506). Many times She kissed his feet, and when She wished to kiss his face She interiorly asked his benevolent consent. The sweetest Child returned these caresses of his Mother not only by the expression of pleasure in his countenance, which was at the same time full of majesty, but also by other actions usual in children; in Him, however, they were accompanied by a serene deliberation. The most ordinary token of his love

was to recline sweetly upon the bosom of the most pure Mother, or upon her shoulder, encircling her neck with his divine arms. These caresses the Empress Mary met with so much attention and discretion that neither did She solicit them with pettiness like other mothers, nor too timidly withdrew from them. In all things She was most prudent and perfect, without any defect or excess. The greater the love of her most holy Son and his manifestation of it, the more She humbled Herself to the dust, rendering Him profound reverence by which She gauged the tokens of her affection, greatly enhancing their grandeur.

546. There was an interchange of caresses of another kind between the Infant and his Mother, for besides understanding by divine enlightenment all the interior acts of the most holy soul of her Onlybegotten, as I have already stated (481, 534), it often happened that holding Him in her arms She was privileged to see through his humanity as through a crystal casement, thus perceiving the hypostatic union of the Son of God with his human nature, and witnessing the activity of his soul in laboring and praying to the eternal Father for the human race. These operations and intercessions the heavenly Lady faithfully imitated, being entirely absorbed and transformed in her divine Son. His Majesty on his part looked upon Her with additional joy and delight, as if recreating Himself in the purity of such a creature, rejoicing that He had created Her, and that in becoming man the Divinity, in order to form of Her such a living image of his humanity, had taken it from her virginal substance. In regard to this mystery the words of the officers of Holofernes, when they beheld the beauty of Judith in the camp of Bethulia, occurred to me (Judith 10:18): *Who can despise the people of the Hebrews, who have such beautiful women, that we should not think it worth our while for their sakes to fight against them?* This saying seemed to be mysteriously and truly realized in the incarnate Word, since He could say to his eternal Father and to all the rest of the creatures similar words with a most just cause: Who shall fail to see that my coming from heaven and assuming flesh is fully justified, since in order to come upon the earth and dethrone the demon, the world, and the flesh, and to conquer and vanquish them, such a Woman is called into existence as is my Mother among the children of Adam? O sweetest love, virtue of my virtue, life of my soul, most loving Jesus, behold that it is most holy Mary alone who exhibits such beauty in the human nature! She is the only and chosen One (Cant. 6:8), so perfectly pleasing to Thee, my Lord and my God, that She not only equals but far surpasses all the rest of thy people, and She alone compensates for the ugliness of sin in the entire race of Adam.

547. The sweet Mother felt such effects among these delights of her onlybegotten Son and true God that She was more and more spiritualized and deified. And in the flights which her most pure spirit endured, many times would the fire of her love have broken the bonds of her earthly body, causing her soul to dissolve its union with the body and abandon it, if She had not been miraculously comforted and preserved. She spoke to her most holy Son secret words so exalted and full of weight that they cannot come within the range of our expression; all I can reproduce can never be anything more than a mere shadow of that which was manifested to me. She said to Him: "O my Love, sweet life of my soul! Who art Thou, and who am I? What dost Thou desire to make of me, becoming man and lowering so much thy magnificence to favor the useless dust? What shall thy slave do in recognition of the debt she owes to thy love? What return shall I make for the great things Thou hast given me (Ps. 115:12)? My being, my life, faculties and senses, my desires and longings, all is thine. Comfort thy servant and thy Mother so she may not fail in the affection of serving Thee, and at the sight of her own insignificance, since she does not die for love of Thee. O how limited is human capacity! How curtailed its power! How restricted its affections, since they are insufficient for satisfying with equity thy love! Yet Thou must always

conquer in being magnificent and merciful with thy creatures, and to Thee belong the triumphal songs of love, while we must always consider ourselves overcome and vanquished by thy power. Let us remain humbled and affixed to the dust, while thy greatness is magnified and exalted through all the eternities.” The heavenly Lady, participating in the science of her most holy Son, sometimes beheld the souls who in the course of the new law of grace were to distinguish themselves in divine love, the works which they were to perform, and the martyrdom which they would suffer in imitation of the Lord himself; and with this knowledge She was inflamed in emulation of love so strong that this martyrdom of desire in the Queen was greater than the martyrdom they were to suffer. To Her happened what the Spouse says in the Canticles (Cant. 8:6), that the emulation of love *is strong as death and hard as hell*. To these agonies of the loving Mother, caused by the mortal wounds of divine affection, her most holy Son answered in the words there used, *put Me as a seal upon thy heart, as a seal upon thy arm* (Ib.), causing in Her at the same time the full understanding of these words as well as their actual fulfillment. By this divine suffering most holy Mary was a Martyr above all other Martyrs. Among such beds of lilies (Ib. 2:16) the meekest Lamb Jesus wandered while the day of grace began to break and the shadows of the ancient law receded (Ib. 17).

548. The divine Child ate nothing during the time in which He was nourished at the virginal breast of his most holy Mother, for this milk was his only sustenance. This was most sweet and substantial, since it originated in a body so pure, perfect and refined, and one built up in exquisite harmony without any disorder or inequality. No other body was equal to it in healthfulness, and the sacred milk, even if it would have been preserved a long time, would have remained free from corruption; by a special privilege it could never change or sour, though the milk of other women immediately degenerates and becomes corrupt as experience teaches.

549. The most happy spouse Joseph not only witnessed the favors and caresses which passed between the Child and his Mother, but he was also worthy to receive them directly from Jesus himself. Many times his heavenly Spouse placed Him in his arms. This happened whenever She had to do some work during which She could not hold Him, for example when She prepared the meals, arranged the clothes of the Infant, or cleaned the house. On these occasions St. Joseph held Him in his arms, and he always felt divine effects in his soul. The child Jesus showed exterior signs of affection by his pleased looks, by reclining upon the chest of the Saint, and with the gravity and majesty of the King gave him certain caresses with demonstrations of affection customary with children in regard to their fathers, though with St. Joseph these were not so common nor with such endearment as with his true Virgin Mother. Whenever She left Him in his care She received from St. Joseph the relic of the Circumcision, which St. Joseph ordinarily carried with him for his consolation. Thus both heavenly Spouses were continually enriched, She by holding her most holy Son, and he by his sacred blood and deified flesh. They preserved it in a crystal vase (521, 534) which St. Joseph had purchased with the money sent to them by St. Elizabeth. In this they had enclosed the particle of flesh and the sacred blood shed at the Circumcision which had been caught in pieces of linen. The opening of the vase was encased in silver, which the mighty Queen, in order to preserve the sacred relics more securely, had sealed by her mere command. Thus the silver opening was more firmly sealed than if it had been soldered by the artisan who had made the vessel. In this vase the prudent Mother treasured the relics during her whole life, and afterwards She entrusted it to the Apostles, leaving it as an inheritance to the holy Church. In this immense sea of mysteries I find myself so annihilated and dumbfounded by my ignorance as a woman, and so narrowed in my powers of expression, that I leave much of it to the faith and piety of Christians.

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

550. My daughter, thou hast been warned in the previous chapter not to inquire into anything of the supernatural order from the Lord (529), neither in order to alleviate thy suffering, nor for any natural inclination, and even less out of vain curiosity. Now I warn thee likewise not to give place, for any of these reasons, to thy affections in order to covet or execute anything natural or external; for in all the operations of thy exterior faculties and works involving the senses thou must moderate and subject thy inclinations, not giving in to their demands, though they are under the color of apparent virtue or piety. I had no danger of excess in these affections due to my sinless innocence, nor was there a lack of piety in my desire of remaining in the cave where my most holy Son had been born and received circumcision; yet nevertheless I did not wish to manifest my desire even when asked about it by my spouse, because I preferred obedience to this pious inclination, and I knew it is more secure for souls, and more according to the pleasure of the Lord, to seek his holy will by the advice and opinion of another, rather than by one's own inclination. I acted this way for greater merit and perfection; but in thee and in the rest of souls, who are in danger of error by thy own judgment, this law must be observed most rigorously in order to prevent and avoid error with discretion and diligence, since the ignorant creature, with a heart so limited, is easily drawn by its puerile inclinations to what is trivial, often occupying himself entirely with what is small as if it was great, and what is nothing seems to him something. All this incapacitates the soul and deprives it of great spiritual goods, of grace, light and merit.

551. Write this doctrine in thy heart, together with all the others I shall give thee, and seek to use it as a memorial of all that I did, so just as thou dost know it thou mayest understand and execute it. Attend to the reverence, love and care, to the holy and circumspect fear with which I treated my most holy Son. And though I always lived with this vigilance, yet after I conceived Him in my womb I never lost sight of Him, nor did the love which His Highness then imparted to me relax my watchfulness. With this ardent desire to please Him more my heart found no rest until it was united and absorbed in the participation of that highest Good and ultimate end, at times finding rest as in my center. But then I returned to my continual solicitude, like one who proceeds on her way without detaining herself by that which cannot help but only hinder her desire. So far was my heart from attaching itself to any earthly thing, or from following sensible inclination, that I lived as if I was not composed of the common earthly nature. And if the rest of creatures are not free from their passions, or do not overcome them to the degree they are able, let them not blame nature but their own will; for weak nature can instead complain of them, since they could by the rule of reason govern and direct it, but do not do so, instead allowing it to follow its disorders, aiding it by their free will, and with their understanding seek out even more dangerous objects and occasions in which they are lost. Because of these precipices which present themselves in human life I warn thee, my dearest, to neither crave nor seek any visible thing, though it be necessary and appears most just. Everything thou dost use by necessity, such as thy cell, thy garments, thy sustenance, and the rest, let it be by obedience and with the approval of thy superiors; for the Lord desires it and I approve it, so thou mayest use them in the service of the Almighty. By such rules as I have inculcated thou must regulate all thy works.