

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 the 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 resign myself to thy will, and wherever thou dost desire to go I shall follow with great pleasure. Arrange it as shall please thee.” The heavenly Lady had an affection for the cave because of its humbleness 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 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: “Divine Providence has ordained that three Kings of the earth, coming from the Orient in search of the King of heaven, shall adore the divine Word in this very place. They are already ten days on the way, for at the hour of the holy birth they were informed of it, and they immediately set out on their journey. Therefore they shall shortly arrive, fulfilling all that the Prophets had from very ancient times foreknown and foretold.”

542. By this new announcement St. Joseph was made joyful and instructed on his part concerning 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, although it is poor and destitute in the eyes of the world, in the sight of eternal Wisdom is rich and precious, the most estimable and preferable on this earth, since the Lord of heaven is satisfied with it and has consecrated it by his presence. He who is the true land of promise can favor us with his vision in this place. And if it is his pleasure He shall give us some protection and shelter against the inclemencies of the weather during the few days in which we are to stay 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 watchful spouse, for She knew his solicitude for the sacred tabernacle which was confided to his care and which was more holy and venerable than the Holy of Holies in the temple. Awaiting the time when her Onlybegotten would be presented in the temple, She was unremitting in her care of Him lest She forget anything necessary to protect Him against the cold and roughness 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 absolute necessity demanded otherwise. Besides all this She made use of her power as Queen of all creation when the inclemencies of winter raged on, for She commanded the frost and the winds, the snow and the ice not to harm their Creator, but rather to spend their elemental rigors and harsh influences upon Her alone. The heavenly Queen gave her commands as follows: "Restrain your wrath before your Creator, Author, Lord and Preserver, who has called you into existence and given you strength and activity. Be mindful, creatures of my Beloved, that you are furnished with rigor because of sin for the chastisement of the disobedience of the first Adam and his progeny (Wis. 5:18). But with the second Adam, who comes to repair this fall and cannot have any part therein, you must be courteous, reverencing and not offending Him, to whom you owe worship and subjection. And therefore I command you in his name to cause no inconvenience or displeasure to Him."

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 these things She behaved most perfectly and prudently, without defect or excess of any kind. The more openly and affectionately her most holy Son manifested his love toward Her, so much the more deeply did She humiliate Herself and so much the greater was her reverence. In the same manner She gauged also the tokens of her affection and greatly enhanced 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 order to become man the Divinity had formed such a living image of Himself and of the humanity which He had taken from her virginal substance. In regard to this mystery the words of the soldiers 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 by coming upon the earth and dethroning the demon, the world, and the flesh, and by conquering and vanquishing 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 most holy Mary alone is She who exhibits such immense 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 repairs 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 by thus becoming man in my womb, lowering thy greatness and magnificence in favor of such useless dust? O what shall thy slave do to pay the debt of love which she owes to Thee? What return shall I make for the great things which Thou hast done to me (Ps. 115:12)? My being, my life, faculties, feelings, desires and longings, all is thine. Comfort thy servant and

thy Mother so she may not fail in thy service at the sight of her own insignificance and die for love of Thee. O how limited is the power of man! How circumscribed his capacity! How insufficient is human affection, since it cannot sufficiently render a just return for thy love! But the victory of mercy and magnificence must always be thine, and to Thee belong the triumphal songs of love, while we must on the contrary always consider ourselves overcome and vanquished by thy power. Let us be humiliated and grovel in 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 were to suffer in imitation of the Lord. In this knowledge She became so inflamed with love that her longings of love caused in Her a greater martyrdom than those actually suffered by the saints. To Her happened what the Spouse in the Canticles mentions (Cant. 8:6), that the emulations of love are 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 his breast, and by other tokens of affection customary with children in regard to their fathers; but in Him these tokens were always tempered with kingly majesty. Yet all this was not so frequent in his dealings with St. Joseph, 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 bore about 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 must leave much of it to be fathomed by the faith and piety of Christians.

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

550. My daughter, in a previous chapter thou hast been instructed not to seek information from the Lord by supernatural means (529), neither in order to relieve any suffering nor in order to satisfy a natural hankering of curiosity. Now I exhort thee likewise not to yield, for any of these reasons, to the desire of performing any exterior action according to the promptings of nature, for in all the activity of thy exterior faculties and senses thou must seek to moderate and subject thy inclinations, not yielding to them in their demands even though they have the color of virtue or piety. I was in no danger of going to excess in these affections due to my sinlessness, 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 despite all this I did not wish to express 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 counsel and opinion of another rather than by one's own inclination. In me this course of action was advisable only because of the greater perfection contained therein, but in thee and in other souls, who are subject to error in their judgment, this rule must be observed most rigorously in order to prevent and avoid mistakes diligently and discreetly, for in their ignorance and pusillanimity men are easily carried away by their feelings and inclinations toward insignificant things, and very often they occupy themselves with trifles as if they were important matters, and vanities as if they were realities. All such activity weakens the soul and deprives it of great spiritual blessings, of grace, enlightenment and merit.

551. This doctrine thou must write in thy heart together with all the others which I am to give thee. Seek to use it as a reminder of all I did, so as thou hast come to know it thou mayest also understand and execute it in thy life. Take notice of the reverence, love, solicitude, and the holy and discreet fear with which I conversed with my most holy Son. I always lived in this kind of watchfulness, and even after I had conceived Him in my womb I never lost sight of it, nor did the great love which He showed me diminish it in me. In this ardent desire to please Him my heart found no rest until it was entirely united and absorbed in the enjoyment of this my highest Good and ultimate end. With the exception of certain times during which I rested in his love as in my only joy, I invariably carried about with me this continual solicitude like one who restlessly pursues his way and does not permit himself to be delayed by anything that is useless or hinders the attainment of his desired object. So far was my heart from attaching itself to any earthly thing, or from following the inclinations of the senses, that I lived as if I had not been composed of earthly substance. If other creatures are not free from passions, or do not overcome them as much as possible, let them not blame nature but their own will; on the contrary, they justly incur the reproaches of weak nature, because instead of governing and directing nature by the sovereign power of the will they make no use of that power. They allow the natural inclinations to involve them in disorders, encouraging it by the free will, and using their understanding to find still more dangerous occupations and occasions of ruin. Because of these pitfalls presenting themselves in mortal life I warn thee, my dearest, not to hanker after or seek any visible things, though they may appear to thee necessary and most appropriate for the circumstances. Use all things, such as thy cell, thy garments, thy sustenance, and whatever else is of this life, only in

obedience and with the full consent of thy superiors because the Lord requires this of thee, and it is also my pleasure to see thee apply all things for the service of the Omnipotent. By such rules as I have inculcated thou must regulate all of thy undertakings.