

CHAPTER XXIII

Jesus, Mary and Joseph travel from Gaza through the Desert into Egypt; Their Hardships and Consolations along the Way.

630. On the third day after our Pilgrims had arrived in Gaza they departed from that city for Egypt. Soon after leaving the inhabited parts of Palestine they entered the sandy deserts of Bersabee, which they were obliged to traverse for sixty leagues in order to arrive and take their abode in Heliopolis, which is now called Cairo in Egypt. This journey through the desert consumed a number of days, for they could travel but a short distance each day, not only because of the laborious progress over the deep sand, but also because of the hardships occasioned by the lack of shelter. There were many incidents on their way through this solitude; I shall mention some of them, from which others can be conjectured, for it is not necessary to relate all of them. In order to understand how much Mary and Joseph together with the infant Jesus suffered on their pilgrimage, it must be remembered that the Almighty permitted his Onlybegotten, with his most holy Mother and St. Joseph, to suffer the inconveniences and hardships naturally connected with travel through this desert; and though the heavenly Lady made no complaints, yet She was much afflicted, which was also true of her most faithful spouse, for both of them suffered many personal inconveniences and discomforts, while the Heart of the Mother was afflicted still more because of the sufferings of her Son and of St. Joseph, who also suffered because he could not alleviate the sufferings of the Child and his Spouse by his diligence and labor.

631. During this journey of sixty leagues through the desert they had no other night shelter than the sky and open air; moreover, it was in the time of winter, for this journey took place in the month of February, only six days after the Purification as was related in the last chapter (609, 613). On the first night on these sandy plains they rested at the foot of a small hill, this being the only protection they could find. The Queen of heaven with the Child in her arms seated Herself on the earth and took some nourishment, partaking of the food brought with them from Gaza. The Empress of heaven also nursed the infant Jesus at her breast, and His Majesty by his contented countenance consoled his Mother and her spouse. By his diligence, using his own cloak and some sticks, St. Joseph formed a tabernacle or canopy so the divine Word and most holy Mary could be somewhat defended from the dew of the night, sheltering them with that field tent, however narrow and humble. During that night the ten thousand Angels, who full of marvel assisted these earthly Pilgrims in visible human shapes, formed a guard around their King and Queen. The great Lady perceived that her divine Son offered up to the eternal Father the hardships and labors both of Himself and of Mary and Joseph. In these prayers and in the other acts of his deified soul the Queen joined Him for the greater part of the night. The divine Infant slept for a short time in her arms, while She continued wakeful and engaged in heavenly colloquies with the Most High and his Angels. St. Joseph slept upon the ground, resting his head upon the chest which contained the clothing and other articles of their baggage.

632. On the next day they pursued their journey, and on the way the provision of bread and some fruit which they had brought was exhausted, so the Lady of heaven and earth and her holy spouse began to suffer great and extreme necessity and felt the hunger. Although St. Joseph suffered this more, yet both felt it with much affliction. On one of the first days of their journey they took no sustenance until nine o'clock at night, not having any more of even the coarse and poor food which until then had sustained them in their hardships and labor. Since nature demanded some refreshment after the exertion and weariness of travel, and since there was no

way of supplying their needs by natural means, the heavenly Lady addressed Herself to the Most High in these words: "Eternal God, great and powerful, I give Thee thanks and bless Thee for the magnificent works of thy bounty, and because without my merits, solely due to thy merciful condescension, Thou didst give me being and life, and with it hast preserved me and lifted me up, though I am but dust and a useless creature. For these benefits I have not given a worthy return; thus how can I ask for myself what I cannot repay? However, my Lord and Father, look upon thy Onlybegotten and grant me what is necessary to nourish his natural life and also that of my spouse, so by it he may serve Thy Majesty and I may serve thy Word made flesh (Jn. 1:14) for human salvation."

633. In order for the clamors of the sweetest Mother to proceed from yet greater tribulation, the Most High permitted the elements to afflict them more than at other times, which added to the sufferings caused by their fatigue, destitution and hunger, for there arose a storm of wind and rain which harassed and blinded them by its fury. This hardship afflicted still more the pious and loving Mother due to her care for the infant God, so delicate and tender, who was not yet fifty days old. Though She tried to cover and protect Him as much as possible, yet She could not prevent Him from feeling the inclemency of the weather, and He shed tears and shivered from the cold in the same manner as other children are accustomed to do. Then the careful Mother, making use of her power as Queen and Mistress of creatures, peremptorily commanded the elements not to afflict their Creator, but rather to serve Him as a coat of refreshment, wreaking their vengeance upon Her alone; and as related before at the occasions of the birth of Christ and the journey to Jerusalem (543-4, 590), again the wind immediately moderated and the storm abated, not daring to approach the Mother and Child. In return for this loving forethought the infant Jesus commanded his Angels to assist his most kind Mother and serve Her as a shield against the inclemency of the weather. They immediately complied and constructed a resplendent and beautiful globe around and over their incarnate God, his Mother, and her spouse. In this they were protected and defended more effectually than all the wealthy and powerful of the world in their palaces and rich garments. The same they did several times during the journey through the desert.

634. Yet they were still in need of food and destitute of other things which could not be provided by their own mere human effort. But the Lord allowed them to fall into this need so by listening to the acceptable prayers of his Spouse He could make provision also for this by the hands of the Angels. They brought them delicious bread and well seasoned fruits, and moreover a most delicious drink, all of which they administered and served with their own hands. Then all of them together sang hymns of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord, who gives food to all creatures at opportune times (Ps. 135:25; 144:15) so the poor may eat and be filled (Ps. 21:27), whose eyes and hopes are fixed upon his royal providence and bounty. Such was the delicate feast with which the Lord regaled his three exiled Wanderers in the desert of Bersabee, which was the same desert in which Elias, fleeing from Jezebel, was comforted by the hearth cake brought to him by the Angel so he could travel to mount Horeb (III Kg. 19:3, 6ff.). Yet neither this bread, nor the bread and meat which once before the ravens had miraculously brought him every morning and evening at the torrent of Carith (Ib. 17:6), nor the manna which fell from heaven for the Israelites, though it was called the bread of angels (Ps. 77:24-25) and dropped from heaven, nor the quails which were carried to them by the African winds (Ex. 16:13ff.; Ps. 77:27-28), nor the cloud-tent which overshadowed them (Num. 10:34), none of these refreshments and benefits can be compared to that which the Lord provided for his Onlybegotten made man, his heavenly Mother, and her spouse. These favors were not to be conferred upon a

prophet, or upon such an ungrateful and inconsiderate people, but in order to give life and nourishment of God himself made man and for his true Mother; they were intended for the preservation of the natural life of Christ, upon which depended the eternal life of the entire human race. But if this food was worthy of the excellence of those who were invited, so also was the gratitude and return superabundant and entirely commensurate with the greatness of the benefit. And so all this would be so much the more opportune the Lord permitted the necessity to progress to the extreme and the Mother herself to implore the assistance of heaven.

635. Let the poor rejoice in this example and let not the hungry be dismayed, let the forlorn find new hope, and let none complain of divine Providence, no matter how afflicted and needy they may find themselves. When has the Lord ever failed him who hoped in his assistance (Ps. 17:31)? When has He ever turned away his countenance from his afflicted and needy children? We are brothers of his only Son incarnate (Rom. 8:29), children and heirs of his blessings (Ib. 17), and also children of his most kind Mother. Why then, ye children of God and of this most holy Mother, do you continue to mistrust such Parents in your poverty? Why do you deprive them of this honor, and yourselves of the privilege of being assisted and sustained by them? Come, come to them with humility and confidence so they may look upon you with the eyes of Parents (Ps. 10:5), and with their ears listen to the cry of your necessity. The hands of this Lady are extended to the poor, and her palms opened for the needy (Prov. 31:20). And you, the rich of this age, why will you confide only in your uncertain riches (I Tim. 6:17), with the danger of falling away from the faith, heaping upon yourselves the most grave cares and sorrows as warned by the Apostle (Ib. 9-10)? By such avarice you neither confess nor conduct yourselves as children of God and of his Mother, but rather deny it by your works, and hence must consider yourselves spurious offspring or children of other parents, since true and legitimate children know how to confide only in the care and love of their true parents and abhor placing their trust in others, who are not only strangers but enemies. This truth the divine light teaches me, and charity compels me thus to speak.

636. The most high Father was not only careful to provide nourishment for our Pilgrims, but also visible relief against the tediousness of this journey and continued solitude. It happened a few times, when the heavenly Lady rested on the ground from her fatigue, that as related on another occasion (185) a great multitude of birds came flying towards Her from the mountains. By the sweetness of their warbling and the variety of their plumage they entertained and recreated Her, perching on her shoulders and hands with signs of great joy. The most prudent Queen gently received them and invited them to acknowledge their Creator by their songs and to be thankful for his having created them so beautiful and arrayed them in their gorgeous plumage, given them the air and the earth for their enjoyment, and provided them with daily food and sustenance. The birds obeyed her exhortations with joyous movements and sweet warblings, while the loving Mother joined them with still more sweet and melodious praise for the infant Jesus, extolling Him, blessing Him, and acknowledging Him as her God and her Son, and as the Author of all these wonders. The holy Angels also took part in these colloquies so full of sweetness, and alternated their offerings of praise with that of the great Lady and of these simple birds. All this produced a harmony more perceptible to the spirit than the senses, and of admirable concord for the rational soul.

637. At other times the heavenly Princess conversed with the Child and said: "My love and light of my soul, how can I alleviate thy labor? How can I relieve thy discomfort? How can I make such a burdensome journey less painful for Thee? Oh would that I could carry Thee not in my arms but in my bosom, and make for Thee a soft couch in my heart so Thou mayest rest there

without fatigue!” The most sweet Jesus replied: “My beloved Mother, I am much relieved in thy arms, restful on thy bosom, pleased with thy affections, and regaled by thy words.” Sometimes the Son and Mother conversed with each other interiorly, and these conversations were so exalted and divine that our words cannot express them. St. Joseph shared in many of these mysteries and consolations, and thus he eased his journey and forgot his hardships, feeling within himself the delight and sweetness of such companionship; however, he did not hear or perceive what the Child said audibly to his Mother, for at that time in the life of the Savior this favor was reserved for Her alone, as I have already remarked above (577). In this manner our Exiles proceeded on their way to Egypt.

*TEACHING OF THE QUEEN OF HEAVEN,
MOST HOLY MARY, OUR LADY.*

638. My daughter, just as those who know the Lord also know how to trust in Him (Ps. 9:11), so those who do not hope in his goodness and immense love do not have perfect knowledge of His Majesty. Because of the lack of faith and hope their love is also deficient, for we readily place our love in whom we have confidence and whom we esteem (Mt. 6:21). In this error lies the source of all the damage done to mortals, for they have such a low conception of the infinite bounty which gave them being and which preserves them that they fail to place full confidence in their God. Failing in this they also fail in the love due to Him and divert it toward creatures; they esteem in them what they are seeking, namely power, riches, ostentation and vanity. And though the faithful can avoid this damage by infused faith and hope, yet they allow these virtues to remain dead and idle, and by failing to exercise them they debase themselves below that which they covet. Those who have riches trust in them (Ps. 51:9); others covet them if they do not possess them; others procure them by very perverse ways and means; others confide in the powerful (Ps. 145:2-3), flattering and applauding them. Thus it happens that very few remain for the Lord who merit his careful providence, who trust themselves to Him and know Him as their Father* who cares for them, nourishes and preserves them, without forsaking anyone in their necessity.

639. This dark deceit has provided the many lovers of the world, has filled it with avarice and concupiscence against the will and pleasure of the Creator, and has made men insane in their desires, since all of them commonly strive after riches and earthly possessions, claiming thereby merely to satisfy their needs, which is only a pretext for hiding their lack of interest in higher things. In reality they lie to themselves abominably, since they are seeking the superfluous; not what is really necessary, but what ministers to worldly pride. If men would confine their desires to what is really necessary, it would be unreasonable to put any confidence in creatures instead of placing it in God alone, who ineffably provides even for the young ravens with no less solicitude than if their crowings were prayers sent up to their Creator for help (Ps. 146:9). Secure in this confidence I was not alarmed in my exile and prolonged journey; since I trusted in the Lord, He provided for me in the time of my need. Thou also, my daughter, who art aware of this exalted providence, must not afflict thyself in the time of need, nor neglect thy duties in order to make provision for them, nor confide in human efforts or in creatures. After having done what is required of thee, the most efficacious means is to confide in the Lord without being disturbed or confused; hope patiently, even when help is somewhat delayed. It will always be at hand at a

* cf. Mt. 7:22-23 [Ed]

time when it will do the most good (Ps. 144:15), and when the paternal love of the Lord can manifest itself most conveniently and openly. Thus it happened with me and my spouse in the time of our destitution and necessity.

640. Those who do not bear with adversity and do not put up with privations, who turn toward dried up cisterns (Jer. 2:13), trusting in deceit and in the powerful of this world; those who are not moderate in their desires, and greedily covet what is unnecessary for the sustenance of life; those who anxiously cling to what they possess, fearing that it may be diminished, and denying to the poor the alms which is their due; all these have reason to fear lest God deny them that which they could not wait for divine Providence to provide, showing Himself just as miserly in giving to them as they are in their confidence in Him and in giving to the poor for love of Him. But the true Father, who is in heaven, who causes the sun to rise over the just and the unjust (Mt. 5:45), and lets the rain fall on the good and the bad, nevertheless helps all, giving them life and nourishment. However, just as his blessings are distributed to the good and the bad, so also it cannot be a rule with God to give greater temporal goods to the good and less to the bad. On the contrary, He prefers the chosen and predestined ones to be poor (James 2:5) because they thus gain more merit and reward, and also because there are few who know how to use wealth properly and who can retain it without disorderly greed. Although my most holy Son and I had nothing to fear from this danger, yet He desired to furnish this example to men and teach them this science through which eternal life comes to them.