

CHAPTER XXII

Jesus, Mary and Joseph begin Their Journey to Egypt, Accompanied by the Angelic Spirits; They Arrive at the City of Gaza.

619. Our heavenly Pilgrims left Jerusalem and entered upon their banishment during the silence and obscurity of night, full of solicitude for the Pledge of heaven who they carried with them into a strange and unknown land. Although faith and hope strengthened them (for in no other beings could these virtues be more firmly and securely established than in our Queen and her most faithful spouse), nevertheless the Lord gave room for suffering, since this was unavoidable due to the love they had for the infant Jesus, and particularly because they did not know all that would happen during such a long journey, nor when it would end, nor how they would fare in Egypt where they would be entire strangers, nor what comfort or convenience they would find there for raising the Child, nor even how they would be able to ward off great sufferings from Him on the way to Egypt. Therefore the hearts of these most holy Parents were filled with many misgivings and anxious thoughts when they parted with so much haste from their lodging place. But their sorrow was much relieved when the aforementioned ten thousand courtiers of heaven (589) again appeared to them in human forms and in their former splendor and beauty, and when they again changed the night into brightest day for the holy Pilgrims. As they set forth from the portals of the city the holy Angels humbled themselves and adored the incarnate Word in the arms of his Virgin Mother. They also encouraged Her by again offering their homage and service, stating it was the will of the Lord for them to guide and accompany Her on the journey.

620. To the afflicted heart the least consolation seems precious; hence this one, being in itself a great relief, comforted our Queen and her spouse Joseph very much. They therefore entered upon their journey with much confidence, choosing the way which led through the city gate in the direction of Nazareth. The divine Mother longed to visit again the place of the Nativity in order to venerate the sacred cave and the crib which had offered shelter and hospitality to her most holy Son at his entrance into the world, but the holy Angels, knowing of her unspoken desires, said to Her: "Our Queen and Lady, Mother of our Creator, we should hasten on our journey without any delay, since because of the escape of the magi Kings and their failure to return to Jerusalem, and the words spoken by the priest Simeon and by Anne, the people have been roused to attention. Some of them have begun to say Thou art the Mother of the Messiah, others that Thou knowest of Him, and others say thy Son is a Prophet. Various rumors are also spread about concerning the visit of the Kings in Bethlehem, and of all these things Herod is informed. He has commanded that Thou be sought after very carefully, and consequently a most diligent search is being made to find Thee. Because of this the Most High has commanded Thee to flee at night and with so much haste."

621. The Queen of heaven yielded to the will of the Almighty thus made known to Her by the holy Angels. She therefore revered from afar the sacred place of the Nativity of her Onlybegotten, renewing the memory of the mysteries there wrought and the favors there received. The holy Angel who stood as guard of the sacred cave approached them on their way in visible form and adored the incarnate Word in the arms of his Mother. Since She was thus allowed to see this Angel and speak to him the heavenly Lady was rejoiced and comforted still more. She would have also preferred to travel by way of Hebron, since it was only a short distance from the one they were now traveling, and Elizabeth was just at that time in that city

with her son John. But the caution of St. Joseph, who was more apprehensive, prevented also this diversion and delay. He said to his heavenly Spouse: "My Lady, I think it is extremely important that we not delay our journey even for one instant, but hasten as much as possible to flee from the place of danger. Therefore it will not be advisable to go to Hebron, where they could find us more easily than in other parts of the country." The humble Queen answered: "Let it be according to thy pleasure; yet I desire thee to give me permission to send one of these celestial spirits to Elizabeth in order to inform my cousin of the cause of our flight so she herself may protect her son, for the wrath of Herod is so roused that it will extend to them."

622. The Queen of heaven knew of the design to murder the children, but She did not tell St. Joseph of it at that time. Here I must marvel at the obedience and humility of most holy Mary, which was so exquisite and rare, for She obeyed St. Joseph not only in that which he commanded, but also in that which concerned Herself alone, namely in the matter of sending an Angel to St. Elizabeth. Although She could have sent the Angel by a mere wish, without even expressing it in words, She nevertheless preferred not to do so without permission and in obedience to her spouse. I must confess my shame and negligence, since having before my eyes the most pure fountain of waters I do not satiate my thirst, nor profit by the light and the example before me, though it is so vivid, so sweet, powerful and attractive in teaching us all to abjure our own reprehensible wills. Then with the permission of St. Joseph most holy Mary dispatched one of the principal Angels of her guard in order to notify St. Elizabeth of what was passing. As the Superior of the angelic spirits She instructed her messenger on this occasion what he was to say to the holy matron and to the child John.

623. The Angel, according to the order and pleasure of the Queen, proceeded to inform the fortunate and blessed Elizabeth of all these events as far as was proper. He told her the Mother of God was fleeing before the wrath of Herod into Egypt, since this tyrant was now searching for the Child in order to kill Him. He warned her to see to the safety of St. John by hiding him in some place of refuge. He also manifested to her other mysteries of the incarnate Word according to the command of the heavenly Mother. St. Elizabeth was filled with joy and wonder at this message, and she expressed her desire to meet and adore the infant Jesus and see his Mother, asking him whether they could be reached. The holy Angel answered that her King and Lord was passing with his Mother at a distance from Hebron and could not wait for her visit; St. Elizabeth therefore gave up her project. Overflowing with tender and tearful affection, she asked the Angel to bring affectionate greetings to the Son and Mother. The Angel then returned with his message to the Queen. St. Elizabeth immediately dispatched a servant with some gifts consisting in provisions, money and material for clothing the Infant. She foresaw their needs in a strange country and instructed the servant to overtake them with all haste. He met them in Gaza, which lies a little less than twenty hours from Jerusalem, on the river Besor, and on the road from Palestine to Egypt, not far from the Mediterranean Sea.

624. In this town they remained two days, for St. Joseph and the beast of burden which carried the Queen were worn out by the fatigue of the journey. From that place they sent back the servant of St. Elizabeth, and the holy spouse Joseph did not fail to caution him not to tell anyone of their whereabouts. But God provided still more effectually against this danger, for He took away from this man all remembrance of what St. Joseph had charged him to conceal, and thus he retained only his message to St. Elizabeth. Most holy Mary expended the presents sent by Elizabeth in entertaining the poor, for She who was Mother of the poor could not bear to pass them by unassisted. Of the material sent to Her She made a cloak for the divine Infant and one for St. Joseph to shelter them from the discomforts of the season and the journey. She also used

other things in their possession for the comfort of her Child and of St. Joseph. The most prudent Virgin would not rely on miraculous assistance whenever She could provide for the daily needs by her own diligence and labor, for in these matters She desired to subject Herself to the natural order and depend upon her own efforts. During the two days which they spent in that city most pure Mary, in order to enrich it with great blessings, performed some wonderful deeds. She freed two sick persons from the danger of death and cured their ailments. She restored to another person, a crippled woman, the use of her limbs. In the souls of many who met Her and conversed with Her She caused divine effects of the knowledge of God and of a change of life. All of them felt themselves moved to praise their Creator. But neither the Blessed Mother nor St. Joseph spoke a word about their native country, nor of the destination or object of their journey, for if this information had been added to the public notice caused by their wonderful actions the attention of Herod's agents might have been drawn toward them, and they might have found sufficient inducement to follow them after their departure.

625. Words fail me in describing what I have been made to understand concerning the happenings during this journey of the infant Jesus and his Virgin Mother; moreover, I fall short of the sentiments of reverence and piety which such admirable mysteries would require. The arms of most pure Mary continually served as a delightful couch for the new and true king Solomon (Cant. 3:7). Since She penetrated in spirit into the secret of the most holy humanity of Christ, it happened sometimes that the Son and Mother interchanged sweet colloquies and canticles of praise in honor especially of the infinite essence of God and of all his attributes and perfections. On these occasions the Son of God favored his sovereign Mother with new visions of intellectual clearness in which She perceived the unity of essence in the Trinity of Persons; the operations *ad intra* in the generation of the Word and the procession of the Holy Ghost; how the Three are from eternity; how the Word is generated by the operation of the eternal intellect, and how the Holy Ghost is breathed forth in the operation of the will; how there is no need of any succession of before or after, but how all is from eternity, and how it happens that we conceive these operations with the idea of duration or succession of time. She also perceived how these three Persons comprehend each other by one and the same act of understanding, and how this comprehension includes the Divinity of the incarnate Word united to the humanity, forming one Person, and what effects this union produces in the humanity.

626. Filled with this exalted knowledge the great Lady allowed her thoughts to descend from the Divinity to the humanity, and composed new canticles of praise and gratitude for the creation of this sacred humanity, most perfect in soul and body; the soul, in its plenitude and all possible abundance of wisdom, gifts and graces of the Holy Ghost; the body, most pure and in the highest possible degree well composed and complexioned. Then again She contemplated the exalted and heroic activity of all his faculties, and having in her soul imitated Him therein, She passed on to bless and give Him thanks for having made Her his Mother, caused Her to be conceived without sin, chosen Her out of thousands, and enriched Her with all the favors and gifts of his powerful right hand as far as was possible in a mere creature. In the exaltation and glory of these and other mysteries the Child spoke to his Mother, and She responded in words which are beyond the tongue of angels and the conception of any other created being. To all this the heavenly Lady attended without neglecting the care and comfort of her Child, giving Him nourishment at her breast three times a day, tenderly caressing Him as a Mother more attentive and loving than all other mothers combined could be toward their children.

627. At other times She said to Him: "My sweetest and most beloved Son, permit me to speak to Thee and to manifest to Thee my desires, although Thou, my Lord, already knowest them;

permit me to be delighted in the sound of thy voice. Tell me, life of my soul and light of my eyes, whether the labors of this journey are fatiguing Thee, whether the rigors of the season and the weather cause Thee affliction, and what I can do for thy service and relief.” And the divine Infant answered: “My Mother, all labors and fatigue are most light and sweet to Me, since I undergo them for the honor of my eternal Father and for the instruction and Redemption of men, and more so in thy company.” The Child wept a few times, yet in great serenity and in the manner of a grown and perfect man, and immediately the loving Mother sought the interior cause of these tears, finding it in his soul. She understood they were tears of love and compassion for the salvation of men, and caused by their ingratitude. In this sorrow and weeping the sweetest Mother imitated Him. She was accustomed to answer his tearful complaints like a compassionate turtledove, lovingly caressing and soothing Him as his affectionate Mother and kissing Him with matchless reverence. The fortunate Joseph often witnessed these divine mysteries and shared in some of the enlightenments, thus consoling himself for the hardships of the journey. At other times he would converse with his Spouse as they journeyed along, asking Her frequently whether She desired any service for Herself or for the Child; or he would approach and adore the Infant, kissing his feet and asking his blessing, and sometimes taking Him in his arms. By these little offices of kindness the great Patriarch sweetened his labors, being at the same time consoled and encouraged by his heavenly Spouse. To all things She attended with a magnanimous Heart, being hindered neither by her interior prayer, nor by her exalted and fervent contemplation, from attending to the corporal affairs, for in all things She was most perfect.

INSTRUCTION OF THE HEAVENLY MOTHER AND LADY.

628. My dearest daughter, for thy instruction and imitation I desire thee in what thou hast written to take as an example the affectionate wonder which the divine light caused in my soul at seeing my most holy Son subject Himself to the inhuman fury of wicked men, such as was shown by Herod on this occasion of our flight from his wrath, and afterwards by the perverse servants of the high priests and magistrates. In all the works of the Most High his greatness, goodness, and infinite wisdom shine forth. I knew by the divine light that the being of God in the Person of the Word was at the same time united to the humanity, and that my most holy Son was the eternal God, powerful, infinite, the Creator and Preserver of all things, and that upon this beneficence depended the very life and existence of this iniquitous king; and yet the most sacred humanity prayed and petitioned his eternal Father to confer upon Herod, at this very time, inspirations, helps, and many blessings, and not to punish him as He could so easily do, for without his effective prayers such full measure of chastisement would have befallen him according to his malice. And though in the end he perished as a pertinacious reprobate, yet the punishment given him was less than if my most holy Son had not prayed for him. All this, and whatever else is contained in this matchless mercy and kindness of my most holy Son, I sought to imitate, for as a Teacher He taught me thus early what He afterwards inculcated by his actions, words and example concerning the love of enemies (Mt. 5:44). When I perceived how He concealed and disguised his infinite power, and how, being the invincible Lion, He became a meek and humble Lamb (Jer. 11:19) amid the fury of ravenous wolves, my heart was overwhelmed and my faculties failed me in the ardent desire of loving Him (Ps. 72:26), imitating Him, and following Him in his love, charity, patience and meekness.

629. This example I place before thee for thy constant imitation so thou mayest understand to what extremes thou must be willing to bear and suffer, forgive and love all who offend thee, for

neither thou nor other creatures are innocent and without fault, and many are burdened with numerous and oft-repeated sins by which they have merited all offenses and insults. Now if persecutions give thee the advantage of imitating Him, why would thou not esteem them as a great blessing? Why would thou not love those who give thee occasion to practice this highest perfection? Why not thank them for this benefit, and hold them not as enemies but as benefactors who give thee an opportunity to obtain what is of so much importance for thy welfare? Because of the object lesson proposed to thee in this History thou shalt not be without guilt if thou fall short in this matter, for the divine light, and all thou dost perceive and understand through it, is before thine eyes as a living example.