

CHAPTER XXVII

Herod Resolves to Murder the Innocents; Most Holy Mary is Aware of This; St. John is Hidden by His Mother.

672. We shall now leave the infant Jesus with his most holy Mother and St. Joseph in the work of sanctifying Egypt by their beneficent presence, and return to Judea which was unworthy of it. Thus we shall understand the course of the devilish cunning and hypocrisy of Herod. That wicked king was waiting for the message of the Magi concerning the newly born King of the Jews, ready to inhumanly take away his life. He trusted for awhile in his own cunning until his anxiety caused him to inquire. But when he was informed of the stay of the Magi in Bethlehem, their departure, their escape from Palestine on a different route, and of other happenings in the temple, he awoke to the fact that he had been foiled in his purpose. He consulted anew some of the experts of the law, and since what they said of Bethlehem, conformable to the Scriptures, coincided with what had happened there, he ordered a strict search to be made for our Queen, her Child, and the glorious St. Joseph. But the Lord, who had commanded their flight from Jerusalem in the night, also concealed them on their journey, so no one knew anything of it or could discover a trace of their flight. Not being able to find them, and no one having any knowledge of them, the henchmen of Herod brought back the answer that no such man, woman or child could be found in the whole country.

673. With this news the indignation of Herod was inflamed (Mt. 2:16) and allowed him not a moment's rest, without finding any means or remedy to deal with the damage he feared from the new King. But the demon, who knew him to be ready for any wickedness, stirred up in his heart the enormous thought of using his royal power to murder all the male children under two years of age around Bethlehem, for in that way the King of the Jews, recently born there, would inevitably be murdered among them. The tyrant was highly satisfied with this scheme, which had never yet been thought of by any other barbarian, and he set about its execution without any of the fear and horror which it was apt to excite in other rational beings. Having studied out his wrathful plans to his satisfaction, he ordered some troops to be gathered in that region and privately instructed some of the more intimate of his officers under severe penalties to kill all the male children under two years old in Bethlehem and its vicinity. The command of Herod was executed, and the whole country was filled with confusion, wailing, and the tears of the parents and the other relations of the innocent victims, who were thus doomed without any possibility of resistance or prevention.

674. This command of Herod was issued six months after the birth of the Savior. When it began to be executed the great Queen happened to hold her divine Son in her arms, lost in the contemplation of his most holy soul. Looking into it as into a clear mirror She saw all that passed in Bethlehem more clearly than if She herself had been present to hear the wailing of the children and the parents. She saw also how her Son prayed to his eternal Father for the parents of these innocents and offered up the murdered children as the first fruits of his own death (Apoc. 14:4), also asking Him for them to receive the use of reason so they could be a willing sacrifice for their Redeemer and accept their death for his glory; thus He would be able to reward them with the crown of martyrdom for what they suffered. All this the eternal Father granted, and since it was made known to the Queen in her onlybegotten Son She joined Him in his prayers and sacrifices. She also pitied the parents of the martyred infants in their heartrending tears and sorrows for their sons. She indeed was the first and true Rachel weeping for the children in

Bethlehem (Jer. 31:15), and there was no mother who sorrowed for them as She did, since no one could be such a Mother as She was to them.

675. She did not know at the time what St. Elizabeth had done in order to safeguard her son John pursuant to the warning of the Angel sent to her by the Queen herself, as narrated in chapter XXII (623). Although She had no doubt regarding the fulfillment of all the mysteries known to Her concerning the Precursor by divine enlightenment, yet She was uncertain of the care and labor which the cruelty of Herod had placed upon St. Elizabeth and her son, and the means by which she had defended him from it. The sweetest Mother did not presume to ask her divine Son concerning this event due to the prudence and reverence always observed by Her in regard to such revelations, for in her humility and patience She counted Herself unworthy and as dust in the sight of the Lord. But the Almighty took notice of her pious and compassionate desires and informed Her that Zacharias, the father of St. John, had died four months after her virginal parturition and about three months after She had left Jerusalem. The widowed St. Elizabeth now had no other company than her son John, with whom she was passing the days of her widowhood in a retired and secluded place, for due to the warning of the Angel and her knowledge of the cruel disposition of Herod she had resolved to flee into the desert with her child and live there in the company of wild beasts rather than within the dangerous reach of Herod. This resolve she had taken with the approbation of the Most High, and guided by his impulse she was now hidden in a cave or cleft of the rock where with great hardship and difficulty she obtained sustenance for herself and her son.

676. The heavenly Lady also knew St. Elizabeth after three years of this solitary life would die in the Lord, that St. John would remain in the desert commencing to live an angelic life, and that he was not to leave his solitude until he would be commanded by the Almighty to preach penance as his Precursor. These sacraments and mysteries the infant Jesus manifested to his most holy Mother along with many other hidden and profound blessings conferred upon St. Elizabeth and her son in that desert. All this She perceived in the same way as She now perceived the death of the innocent children. It filled Her with joy and compassion: Joy because She saw St. John and his mother in safety, and compassion due to of the hardships to which they were exposed in the desert. She immediately asked her most holy Son permission to thenceforward take care of Elizabeth and her son. From that time on She frequently sent her holy Angels to visit them with the consent of the Lord, and through them She also sent them provisions which gave them better sustenance than they could find in the wild abode. Through these angelic messengers the holy Lady kept up a continual and hidden correspondence with her relatives during her stay in Egypt. When the last hour of St. Elizabeth arrived, Mary Immaculate sent to her a great number of Angels to assist her and her child, who was then four years old. These Angels also helped St. John bury his mother in the desert. Thereupon the Queen sent to him every day his sustenance until he was of sufficient age to provide for his living by his own labors and exertions in gathering herbs, roots, and wild honey (Mk. 1:6); from then on he lived on these in admirable abstinence, as I shall relate farther on (*Tran.* 232).

677. Neither the tongue of creatures can describe nor intellect comprehend the vast merits and increase of sanctity accumulating in most holy Mary through these continued and wonderful works, for in all things She acted with a prudence more than angelic. What moved Her to the greatest admiration, love and praise of the Almighty was to see how, at the intercession of her Son and Herself for the Holy Innocents, his divine Providence showed itself so generous toward them. She knew as if She were present the great number of children who were killed; that all of them had the use of their reason, though some were only eight days, two or six months old, and

none of them over two years; and that they all received a high knowledge of the being of God and perfect faith, hope and charity by which they performed heroic acts of faith, worship, and love of God, and reverence and compassion for their parents. They prayed for their parents, and in reward for their sufferings obtained for them light and grace for advancement in spiritual things. They willingly submitted to martyrdom in spite of the tenderness of their age, which made their sufferings so much the greater and consequently augmented their merits. A multitude of Angels assisted them and bore them to limbo or the bosom of Abraham. By their arrival they rejoiced the holy ancients and confirmed them in the hope of speedy liberation. All these were effects of the petitions of the Infant God and the prayers of most holy Mary. Aware of all these wonders She was inflamed with ardor and exclaimed: *Laudate pueri, Dominum, praise the Lord, ye children* (Ps. 112:1), and the Empress joined with them in the praise of the Author of these magnificent works, so worthy of his goodness and omnipotence. Only most pure Mary knew of them and appreciated them properly, and since She was so closely allied to God himself She perfectly reached the degree of humility required for such appreciation; for though She was the Mother of innocence, purity and sanctity, She humiliated Herself more than all creatures with all their faults will ever know how to humiliate themselves. Among all creatures most holy Mary reached a degree of humility peculiar to Herself, which fully equaled the high blessings and gifts received by all other creatures, for She alone comprehended fully how insufficient is the return the creature can make for all the blessings flowing from the boundless love of God. Knowing that without this humility no act of a creature can be worthy of God, She reached the height of all perfection by making all her acts serve as a grateful return for the benefits received.

678. At the end of this chapter I wish to draw attention to the fact that in many things which I am describing a great diversity of opinion exists among the holy Fathers and writers, for example the time of the slaughter of the innocent children, or whether also the newborn children or those that were only a few days old were included in the slaughter, or concerning other doubtful points about which I will not speak, since they are not necessary to my purpose. I write only what is being shown or dictated to me, or about which obedience forces me to ask, so this History may be more clear. It will not do to start a dispute concerning what I write, for from the beginning I said the Lord desires this whole work to be free from mere opinion and contain nothing but what is taught me by the divine light (*Con.* 10). To decide whether that which I write is in harmony with the truth of Holy Scriptures, or befits the majesty and grandeur of my subject, or whether the events narrated bear the necessary sequence or connection: All this I leave to the learning of my teachers and superiors, and to the judgment of the wise and pious. Variety of opinion is as it were inevitable among the writers on these subjects, since they are guided by different authors and are each following those among the ancient authors who satisfy them the most; yet more than a few of the ancient authors (if we except the events related in the canonical writings) relied only on conjecture or on doubtful sources. I, as an ignorant woman, cannot enter upon such discussions.

TEACHING OF THE QUEEN OF HEAVEN, MARY MOST HOLY.

679. My daughter, in what thou hast written I desire thee to learn a lesson from the very sorrow and apprehension with which thou hast performed this task, namely the sorrow in knowing that a noble creature, created by the hand of the Lord according to his image and likeness (*Wis.* 2:23), with such excellences and divine qualities in order to know God, love Him, and be capable of seeing and enjoying Him eternally, can become so oblivious of this dignity, and allow himself to

become so depraved and debased by brutal and horrible passions, as to shed the blood of the innocent who can do no harm to anyone. This should induce thee to weep over the ruin of so many souls, especially in the times in which thou livest when that same ambition which incited Herod has kindled such great hatred and enmity among the children of the Church, causing the perdition of countless souls and the waste and loss of the blood of my most holy Son which was shed as their price and for their rescue (Ephes. 1:7). Do thou bitterly deplore this loss.

680. But likewise be warned by what thou hast seen in others. Ponder the effects of passions admitted into the heart, for if once they have mastered the heart they will either smother it in lust when it finds success, or consume it with wrath upon meeting any opposition. My daughter, fear this danger not only because of the fruits of ambition thou dost notice in Herod, but also because of what thou dost see going on every hour in other persons. Be very careful not to allow thyself to be mastered by anything, be it ever so small, for in order to start a great conflagration the smallest spark is sufficient. I have often repeated to thee this same warning, and I shall continue to do so more often in the future, for the greatest difficulty in practicing virtue consists in dying to all that is pleasurable to the senses. Thou canst not be a fit instrument in the hands of the Lord such as He desires thee to be if thou dost not cleanse thy faculties even of the images of all creatures so they find no entrance into thy desires. I desire it to be to thee an inexorable law that all things except God and his angels and saints be to thee as if they did not exist. This must be thy possession, and for this the Lord opens to thee his secrets and invites thee to his familiar and intimate communication, and I with mine, so thou mayest neither live nor love outside of His Majesty.