

CHAPTER XXV

Jesus, Mary and Joseph settle in the City of Heliopolis in Accordance with the Divine Will; They There Regulate Their Life for the Time of Their Banishment.

653. The traditions which in many parts of Egypt kept alive the remembrance of the wonders wrought by the incarnate Word gave rise to differences of opinion among the Saints and other authors in regard to the city in which our Exiles lived during their stay in Egypt. Some of them assert they dwelt in one city, while others affirm they dwelt in other cities. Yet all of them may be correct and in accordance with facts, since each one may be speaking of a different period of the sojourn of our Pilgrims in Memphis, or Babylon of Egypt, or in Matarieh, for they visited not only these cities but many others. I for my part have been informed that they passed through these and then reached Heliopolis, where they took up their abode. Their holy Guardian Angels instructed the heavenly Queen and St. Joseph they were to settle in this city, for besides the ruin of the temples and idols which just as in other places took place at their arrival here, the Lord had resolved to perform still other miracles for his glory and for the rescue of souls, and the inhabitants of this city (according to the good fortune already prognosticated in its name as “City of the Sun”) were to see the Sun of justice (Mal. 4:2) and grace arise over them and shine upon them. Following these orders St. Joseph sought to purchase for a suitable price some dwelling in the neighborhood, and the Lord disposed that he would find a poor and humble yet serviceable house at a small distance from the city, just such as the Queen of heaven desired.

654. Having therefore found this dwelling near Heliopolis they took their abode therein. At the first entrance of the heavenly Lady with her divine Son and St. Joseph, She prostrated Herself upon the ground, kissing it in profound humility and lovingly thanking the Most High for having secured them this place of rest after their prolonged and laborious journey. She thanked also the earth and the elements for bearing with Her, since in her matchless humility She persisted in esteeming Herself unworthy of all favors. She adored the immutable being of God in this prostration, dedicating all that She was to do in this place to his honor and worship. Interiorly She made a sacrifice of all her powers and faculties, offering to assume readily and with joy all the labors by which the Almighty could be served during her exile, for in her prudence She foresaw and affectionately embraced them all. By means of her divine knowledge She set a great value on sufferings, understanding how highly they are esteemed at the divine tribunal and how her most holy Son looked upon them as a rich treasure and inheritance. Having performed these exalted acts of devotion She set about humbly to clean and arrange the poor little house, borrowing the instruments for this purpose. Although our heavenly strangers were thus sufficiently provided with the shelter of bare walls, they were in need of all else pertaining to the sustenance and comfort of daily life. Since they now lived in an inhabited country, the miraculous assistance which they had enjoyed in the desert through the ministry of the Angels was missing, and the Lord left them to the last resource of the poor, namely the begging of alms. Having come to these straits of suffering hunger, St. Joseph went forth to seek this kind of assistance for the love of God, giving thereby an example to the poor not to complain of their affliction, and all other means failing not to be ashamed to have recourse to this expedient. Thus so early the Lord of all creation allowed Himself to fall into this extreme of being obliged to beg for his sustenance so He would have an occasion to return the alms a hundredfold (Mt. 19:29).

655. During the first three days of their arrival in Heliopolis, just as in other places of Egypt, the Queen had for Herself and for her Onlybegotten no other sustenance than what was begged

by his foster father St. Joseph. When he began to earn some wages by his work he made a humble couch for the Mother and a cradle for her Son, while he himself had as a resting place only the bare ground, for the house was without any furniture until by his own labor he succeeded in making some of the most indispensable pieces for the convenience of all three. In this connection I must not pass over in silence the fact that in their extreme poverty and need most holy Mary and St. Joseph did not regret their house in Nazareth, nor thought of the aid of their relations and friends, nor of the gifts of the Kings which they had given away and which, if they had saved them, would now be useful. All of these regrets were far from their minds, nor did they complain of their great privation and destitution, thinking of the past or worrying about their future; they bore all with incomparable equanimity, joy and tranquility, resigning themselves to divine Providence in their extreme need and poverty. O smallness of our unfaithful hearts! In what excruciating anxieties are we apt to be cast at finding ourselves threatened with poverty or privation! Immediately we begin to rail at occasions lost, at having missed or neglected this or that advantage, or at not having done this or that by which we would have evaded our misfortunes. All of these distresses are vain and most foolish since they can bring no relief. Although it would have been good if we had not committed the sins by which we are thus punished, yet very often we are sorry for them only because of such temporal disadvantages and not for the guilt connected with sin. Slow and dull of heart are we to perceive the spiritual things conducive to our justification and growth in grace (Lk. 24:25), yet sensitive, carnal and bold in delivering ourselves to earthly matters and their anxieties. The example of our Exiles is indeed a severe reprimand for our rudeness and earthliness.

656. The most prudent Lady and her spouse, forsaken and destitute of all temporal help, accommodated themselves joyfully to the poverty of their little dwelling. Of the three rooms which it contained they assigned one to be the sanctuary or temple of the infant Jesus under the tender care of his most pure Mother; there they placed the cradle and her bare couch until after some days, by the labor of the holy spouse and through the kindness of some pious women, they could obtain wherewith to cover it. Another room was set aside for the sleeping place and oratory of St. Joseph; the third served as a workshop for plying his trade. In view of their great poverty and the great difficulty of sufficient employment as a carpenter, the great Lady resolved to assist him by the work of her hands to earn a livelihood. She immediately executed her resolve by seeking to obtain needlework through the intervention of the pious women who, attracted by her modesty and sweetness, were beginning to communicate with Her. Since all She attended to or busied Herself with was so perfect, the reputation of her skill soon spread about, and thus She was never in need of employment whereby to eke out the slender means of livelihood for her Son, true God and true man.

657. In order to obtain the indispensable food and clothing, furnish the house ever so moderately, and pay the necessary expenses, it seemed to our Queen that She must employ all day in work and consume the night in attending to her spiritual exercises. Hence She resolved upon this, but not for any motives of gain, or because She did not continue in her contemplations during the day, for this was her incessant occupation in the presence of the Infant God, as I have so often said and shall repeat hereafter; rather, some of the hours which She was accustomed to spend in special exercises She desired to transfer to the nighttime in order to be able to extend the hours of manual labor, not being willing to ask or expect the miraculous assistance of God for anything which She could obtain by greater diligence and additional labor on her own part. In all such cases we ask for miraculous help more for our own convenience than out of necessity. The most prudent Queen asked the eternal Father to provide sustenance for her divine Son, but at

the same time She continued to labor. Like one who does not trust in herself or in her own efforts, She united prayer with her labors in order to obtain the necessities of life like other men.

658. The Infant God was much pleased with the prudence of his Mother and with her resignation in the midst of her dire poverty, and in return for her fidelity He desired to lessen the labors She had undertaken. One day He spoke to Her from the cradle and said: "My Mother, I desire to set up a rule for thy daily life and labors." Immediately the heavenly Mother knelt before Him and answered: "My sweetest Love and Lord of all my being, I praise and magnify Thee because Thou hast condescended to meet my secret thoughts and desires. May it please Thee to direct my footsteps according to thy holy will, to regulate all my labors according to thy desires, and to order all my occupations in each hour of the day according to thy divine pleasure. And since thy deity has become man, and thy greatness has deigned to condescend to my longings, *speak*, Light of my eyes, *for thy servant heareth*" (I Kg. 3:10). The Lord replied: "My dearest Mother, from the time of nightfall" (that is, from the hour called by us nine o'clock), "Thou shalt take some sleep and rest. And from midnight until the break of day thou mayest occupy Thyself in contemplation with Me, and We shall praise the eternal Father. Thereupon prepare the necessary food for Thyself and Joseph, and afterwards give Me nourishment and hold Me in thy arms until the third hour, when Thou shalt place Me in the arms of thy spouse in order to alleviate his labors. Then retire to thy retreat until it is time to administer his meal, and then return to thy work. Since Thou hast not with Thee the Sacred Scriptures, which were accustomed to console thee, Thou canst by my holy science enter into the doctrines of eternal life in order to follow Me in perfect imitation. And continually pray to my eternal Father for sinners."

659. By this rule of life most holy Mary governed her doings during her stay in Egypt. Every day three times She nursed the infant God at her breast, for when He pointed out to Her the hour in which She was to nurse Him in the morning He did not forbid Her to give Him nourishment at other times as She had been accustomed to do since his Nativity. Whenever the heavenly Mother was engaged in any work She always performed it in his presence and upon her knees, and very commonly during their colloquies and conferences the King from his cradle and the Mother at her work broke out in mysterious canticles of praise; if they were all written down they would outnumber all the psalms and hymns used by the Church, and all that are written, for there can be no doubt that God conversed with the source of his humanity, his most blessed Mother, in a more exalted and wonderful manner than with David, Moses, Mary, Anne, and all the Prophets. By these hymns the heavenly Mother was continually filled with new influences of the Divinity and new longings to be united to his unchangeable Being, for She alone was the phoenix which could be renewed in this conflagration, and the royal eagle which could gaze into the ineffable light of the Sun and soar from height to height whither no other created being could venture to wing its flight. She fulfilled the end for which the divine Word had assumed flesh in her virginal womb, namely to elevate and draw the rational creatures on toward the Divinity. And since among all creatures She was the only one who did not present the hindrance of sin and its effects, nor disordered passions and appetites, but was free of the downward tendency of our earthly nature, She flew upward to her Beloved and to his exalted habitation, not resting until She reached her center, which was the Divinity. Moreover She had always in view the way and the light (Jn. 14:6; 8:12), the incarnate Word, and all her desires and affections met in the immutable being of the Most High; hence She hastened on in burning fervor, embracing her goal rather than flying towards it, and living more in her love than in her life.

660. Sometimes also the Infant God slept under the watchful care of his happy and fortunate Mother so also this saying would be verified: *I sleep, and my Heart watcheth* (Cant. 5:2). And since for Her this most holy body of her Son was the purest and clearest glass through which She gazed and penetrated into the secrets of his deified soul and its operations, She beheld Herself again and again in this immaculate mirror (Wis. 7:16). It was especially consoling to the heavenly Lady to see the most holy soul of her Son revealed to Her in all its heroic operations as a Pilgrim and yet a Comprehensor, while at the same time his bodily faculties were lost in the tranquil and beautiful sleep of childhood, his whole humanity being hypostatically united to the Divinity. Our language is incapable of describing the sweet affections, the flights of love, and the heroic acts of the Queen of heaven on these occasions, and falls far short of the reality; but where words fail, let faith and love supply the deficiency.

661. Whenever She desired to give St. Joseph the consolation of holding the infant Jesus, the Mother of God said: "My Son and Lord, look upon thy faithful servant Joseph with the love of a son and father, and delight Thyself in the purity of his affectionate soul, so acceptable in thy eyes." And to St. Joseph She said: "My spouse, receive in thy arms the Lord, who holds in his hands all the orbs of heaven and earth, and who has given them existence solely by his infinite goodness. Refresh thyself from thy labors in Him who is the glory of all creation." For these favors St. Joseph rendered most humble gratitude, and he was accustomed to ask his Spouse whether he could dare to caress the Child. Encouraged by Her he would do so, and this privilege made him forget all the hardships of his labor, making them easy and sweet in his eyes. Whenever most holy Mary and St. Joseph were at their meals they had with them the Infant; upon serving the meal the heavenly Queen received Him in her arms and ate with great relish, and in holding Him She at the same time gave her most pure soul a sweeter and more nourishing food than to the body, adoring and loving Him as the eternal God and caressing Him with the tenderness of a Mother. It is impossible to conceive the attention which She paid to this double duty: As a creature to her Creator, looking upon Him in his divinity as Son of the eternal Father, the King of kings and Lord of lords, the Maker and Preserver of all the universe; and as a true man in his infancy, serving Him and raising Him. Between these two extremes She was entirely inflamed with love, and her whole being was consumed in heroic acts of admiration, praise and affection. Of all the rest which the two Spouses did it can only be said they were the wonder of the Angels and attained the plenitude of sanctity and pleasure of the Lord.

TEACHING OF THE QUEEN OF HEAVEN, MARY MOST HOLY.

662. My daughter, it being true that I came into Egypt with my most holy Son and my spouse where we knew no relations or friends, in a land of strange religion, where I could offer no home or protection or assistance to my Son whom I loved so much, it can easily be understood what tribulations and hardships we suffered, since the Lord permitted them to come over us. Thou canst not understand with what patience and forbearance we accepted them, and even the angels cannot estimate the reward I merited from the Most High by the love and resignation with which I bore them, which were greater than if I had been in the greatest prosperity. It is true I grieved much to see my spouse in such necessity and difficulty, but in this same pain I blessed the Lord with joy in suffering it. In this most noble patience and peaceful dilation of spirit I desire thee to imitate me whenever the Lord places thee in such occasions, and learn to act with interior and exterior prudence, giving action and contemplation each its due, without allowing one to impede the other.

663. When the necessities of life are lacking to those under thy charge, exert thyself properly to obtain them. If sometimes thou must sacrifice thy own quietude in fulfilling this obligation, thou hast no need to thereby lose thy peace of mind, especially if thou art mindful of what I have so often told thee, not to lose sight of the presence of the Lord, for by his divine light and grace, if thou art careful and dost preserve thy peace, thou canst do all things.* Whatever can duly be procured by human exertion is not to be expected by a miracle, nor must one try to exempt oneself from labor in the hope of supernatural interference on the part of God, for the Lord sweetly concurs with the ordinary and natural course of created things. The labor of the body is serviceable to the soul as a sacrifice and an increase of the merits due to that kind of activity. While at work the rational creature can praise God and adore Him in spirit and in truth (Jn. 4:23). In order to do this, direct all thy actions to his immediate pleasure, and consult with His Majesty, weighing them in the scales of the sanctuary and riveting thy attention upon the divine light which the Almighty infuses into thy soul.

* cf. Philip. 4:13 [Ed.]