

CHAPTER XX

The Presentation of the Infant Jesus in the Temple, and what Happened on that Occasion.

596. The sacred humanity of Christ belonged to the eternal Father not only because it was created like other beings, but it was his special property by virtue of the hypostatic union with the Person of the Word, for this Person of the Word, being his onlybegotten Son, was engendered of his substance, true God of true God. Nevertheless the eternal Father had decreed that his Son be presented to Him in the temple in mysterious compliance with the law of which Christ our Lord was the end (Rom. 10:4). It was established for no other purpose than the just men of the Old Testament perpetually sanctify and offer to the Lord their firstborn sons (Ex. 13:2) in the hope that one thus presented would prove to be the Son of God and a Child of the Mother of the expected Messiah. According to our way of thinking His Majesty acted like men who are apt to repeat and enjoy over and over again a thing which has caused them enjoyment, for though the Father understood and knew all things in his infinite wisdom, He sought pleasure in the offering of the incarnate Word, who by so many titles already belonged to Him.

597. This will of the eternal Father, which was the same as that of his Son insofar as He was God, was known to the Mother of life and of the human nature of the Word, for She saw that all his interior actions were in unison with the will of his eternal Father. Full of this holy science the great Princess passed the night before his Presentation in the temple in divine colloquies. Speaking to the Father She said: "My Lord and God most high, Father of my Lord, a festive day for heaven and earth shall that be in which I shall bring and offer to Thee in thy holy temple the living Host, who is at the same time the Treasure of thy divinity. Rich, O my Lord and God, is this oblation, and in return for it Thou canst well pour forth thy mercies upon the human race, pardoning the sinners who have turned from the straight path, consoling the afflicted, helping the needy, enriching the poor, succoring the weak, enlightening the blind, and meeting those who have strayed away. This is, my Lord, what I ask of thee in offering to Thee thy Onlybegotten, who by thy merciful condescension is also my Son. If Thou hast given Him to me as God, I return Him to Thee as God and man. His value is infinite, and what I ask of Thee is much less. Rich do I return to thy holy temple from which I departed poor, and my soul shall magnify Thee forever because thy divine right hand has shown itself so generous and powerful toward me."

598. The next morning, the Sun of heaven being now ready to issue from his purest dawning, the Virgin Mary, on whose arms He reclined, and being about to rise up in full view of the world, the heavenly Lady, having prepared the turtledoves and two candles, wrapped Him in swaddling clothes and went with St. Joseph from their lodging to the temple. The holy Angels, who had come with them from Bethlehem, again formed in procession in corporeal and most beautiful forms, just as has been said concerning the journey of the preceding day (589). On this occasion however the holy spirits added many other hymns of the sweetest and most entrancing harmony in honor of the Infant God, which were heard only by most pure Mary. Besides the ten thousand Angels who had formed the procession on the previous day, innumerable others descended from heaven, who accompanied by those who bore the shields of the Holy Name of Jesus formed the guard of honor of the incarnate Word on the occasion of his Presentation; however, these were not in corporeal shapes, and only the heavenly Princess perceived their presence. Having arrived at the temple gate, the Blessed Mother was filled with new and exalted sentiments of devotion. Joining the other women, She bowed and knelt to adore the Lord in spirit and in truth (Jn. 4:23) in his holy temple, and She presented Herself before His most high and magnificent Majesty

with his Son upon her arms. Immediately She was immersed in an intellectual vision of the most holy Trinity, and She heard a voice issuing from the eternal Father saying: *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased* (Mt. 3:17). St. Joseph, the most fortunate of men, felt at the same time a new sweetness of the Holy Ghost which filled him with joy and divine light.

599. The high priest Simeon, who was full of years and entirely venerable, moved by the Holy Ghost as explained in the preceding chapter, also entered the temple at that time (Lk. 2:27). Approaching the place where the Queen stood with the infant Jesus in her arms, he saw both Mother and Child enveloped in splendor and glory. The prophetess Anne, who as the Evangelist says had come at the same hour (Ib. 38), also saw the Mother with her Infant surrounded by this wonderful light. Full of celestial joy they approached the Queen of heaven, and the priest received the infant Jesus from her arms upon his hands. Raising his eyes to heaven he offered Him up to the eternal Father, pronouncing at the same time those words so full of mysteries: *Now dost thou dismiss thy servant, O Lord, according to thy word in peace, because my eyes have seen thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples: A light to the revelation of the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel* (Lk. 2:29-32). It was as if he had said: Now, Lord, Thou shalt release me from the bondage of this mortal body and let me go free and in peace, for until now I have been detained in it by the hope of seeing thy promises fulfilled and by the desire of seeing thy Onlybegotten in the flesh. Now that my eyes have seen thy salvation, thy Onlybegotten made man, joined to our nature in order to give it eternal salvation according to the intention and eternal decree of thy infinite wisdom and mercy, I shall enjoy true and secure peace. Now, O Lord, Thou hast prepared and placed before all mortals the Light of the world, so all those may enjoy Him who shall love Him, and so all may gain salvation by the *light which shall enlighten every man who cometh into this world* (Jn. 1:9); for He is the light which is to be revealed to the Gentiles for the glory of his chosen people of Israel.

600. Most holy Mary and St. Joseph heard this canticle of Simeon, wondering at the exalted revelation it contained. The Evangelist calls them in this place the parents of the divine Infant (Lk. 2:27), for such they were in the estimation of the people who were present at this event. Simeon proceeded to turn his attention toward the most holy Mother of the infant Jesus, saying to Her (Ib. 34-5): *Behold this Child is set for the fall and for the resurrection of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be contradicted; and thy own soul a sword shall pierce, that out of many hearts thoughts may be revealed.* Thus spoke St. Simeon, and being a priest he gave his blessing to the happy parents of the Child. Then also the prophetess Anne acknowledged the incarnate Word, and full of the Holy Ghost she spoke of the mysteries of the Messiah to many who were expecting the redemption of Israel. By these two saintly old people public testimony of the coming of the Redeemer was given to the world.

601. At the moment when the priest Simeon mentioned the sword and the sign of contradiction, which were prophetic of the Passion and Death of the Lord, the Child bowed his head; in so doing, and by many interior acts of obedience, He ratified the prophecy of the priest and accepted it as the sentence of the eternal Father pronounced by his minister. All this the loving Mother noticed and understood; She presently began to feel the sorrow predicted by Simeon, and thus in advance was She wounded by the sword of which She had thus been warned. As in a clear mirror She was made to see all the mysteries included in this prophecy: How her most holy Son was to be the rock of scandal (Is. 8:14; I Peter 2:8), the perdition of the unbelievers, and life for the faithful; the downfall of the Synagogue and the raising up of the Church in the gentile world (Mt. 21:43); She saw the triumph He was to gain over the demons and over death (Col. 2:15), but also that it would cost Him so much, namely his outrageous sufferings of the cross; the

contradiction which the infant Jesus would have to suffer in Himself and in his Church (Jn. 15:20) by such a great multitude and number of reprobate souls; and also the excellence of the predestined souls. Most holy Mary knew it all, and in the joy and sorrow of her most pure soul, excited by the prophecies of Simeon and these hidden mysteries, She performed heroic acts of virtue. All these sayings and happenings were indelibly impressed upon her memory, and of all She understood and experienced She forgot not the least point. At all times She looked upon her most holy Son with such a living sorrow as we, mere human creatures with hearts so full of ingratitude, shall never be able to feel. The holy spouse St. Joseph was by these prophecies also made to see many of the mysteries of the Redemption and the labors and sufferings of the most sweet Jesus. But the Lord did not reveal them to him so copiously and expressly as they were known and penetrated by his heavenly Spouse, because there were different reasons for revealing them to him, and the Saint would not have to witness them during his life.

602. The ceremony of the Presentation thus being over, the great Lady kissed the hand of the priest and again asked his blessing. The same She did also to Anne, her former teacher, for her dignity as Mother of God, the highest possible to angels or men, did not prevent Her from these acts of deepest humility. Then in the company of St. Joseph her spouse and the fourteen thousand Angels in procession She returned with the Infant God to her lodging. As I shall relate farther on (606, 609) they remained for some days in Jerusalem in order to satisfy their devotion, and during that time She spoke a few times with the priest about the mysteries of the Redemption and the prophecies mentioned above. Although the words of the most prudent Virgin Mother were few, measured and reserved, they were also so weighty and full of wisdom that they filled the priest with wonder and excited in him the most exalted and sweet sentiments of joy in his soul. The same happened also to the prophetess Anne. Both of them died in the Lord a few days afterwards. The Holy Family lodged at the expense of Simeon. During these days the Queen frequented the temple, and in it She was visited with many favors and consolations in recompense for the sorrow caused by the prophecies of the priest. In order to heighten their sweetness her most holy Son spoke to Her on one of these days, saying: "My dearest Mother and my Dove, dry thy tears and let thy purest Heart be expanded, since it is the will of my Father that I accept the death of the cross. I desire Thee to be my companion in my labors and sufferings. I long to undergo them for souls, who are the works of my hands (Eph. 2:10), made according to my image and likeness, in order to make them partakers of my reign and of eternal life in triumph over my enemies (Col. 2:15). This is what Thou thyself dost desire in union with Me." The Mother answered: "O my sweetest Love and Son of my womb, if my accompanying Thee shall include not only the privilege of witnessing and pitying thy sufferings but also of dying with Thee, so much the greater shall be my relief, for it shall be a greater suffering for me to live while seeing Thee die." In these exercises of love and compassion She passed some days until St. Joseph was advised to flee into Egypt, as I shall relate in the following chapter.

INSTRUCTION GIVEN TO ME BY THE MOST HOLY QUEEN MARY.

603. My daughter, the doctrine and example contained in the foregoing chapter should teach thee to strive after constancy and expansion of thy heart by which thou mayest prepare thyself to accept blessings and adversity, the sweet and the bitter, with equanimity. O dearest soul, how narrow and unwilling is the human heart in that which is contrary and distasteful to its earthly inclinations! How it chafes in labors! How impatiently it meets them! How insufferable it deems all that is contrary to its desires! How persistently it forgets that its Teacher and Master has first

accepted sufferings, and has honored and sanctified them in his own Person (I Peter 2:21)! It is a great shame, yea a great boldness, on the part of the faithful to abhor suffering even after my most holy Son suffered for them, and when so many of the saints before his death were led to embrace the cross solely by the hope that Christ would once suffer upon it, though they would never live to see it. And if this lack of correspondence is so base in others, consider well, my dearest, how vile it would be in thee, who dost show thyself so anxious to attain the friendship and grace of the Most High, to merit the name of a spouse and friend of God, to belong entirely to Him and He to thee, to be my disciple and have me for thy Teacher, and to follow and imitate me as a faithful daughter her Mother. All this must not result in mere sentiment and empty words, or oft-repeated exclamations of *Lord, Lord* (Mt. 7:21); and when the occasion of tasting the chalice and the cross of suffering is at hand, thou must not turn away in sorrow and affliction from the sufferings by which the sincerity of a loving and affectionate heart must be tried.

604. All this would be denying in thy actions what thou dost profess in thy words, and it would be a swerving from the path of eternal life, for thou canst not follow Christ if thou dost refuse to embrace the cross and rejoice in it (Mk. 8:34), nor shalt thou find me by any other way. If creatures fail thee, if temptation or trouble assail thee, if the sorrows of death encompass thee (Ps. 17:5), thou must in no way be disturbed or disheartened, since nothing displeases my most holy Son or me more than placing a hindrance or misapplying the grace given by Him for thy defense. By misusing it and receiving it in vain (II Cor. 6:1) thou dost yield great victory to the demon, who glories much in having disturbed or subjected any soul who calls itself a disciple of Christ and of me; and having once brought thee to default in small things he shall soon oppress thee in greater ones. Confide then in the protection of the Most High and press onward, trusting in me. Whenever tribulation comes over thee, full of this trust fervently exclaim (Ps. 26:1): “*The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? He is my Helper, why should I hesitate? I have a Mother, Mistress, Queen and Lady who shall assist me and take care of me in my affliction.*”

605. In this security seek to preserve interior peace, and keep forever in thy view my works and my footsteps for thy imitation. Remember the sorrow which pierced my heart at the prophecies of Simeon, and how I remained in peace and tranquility without any sign of disturbance, though my heart and soul were transfixed by a sword of pain. In every event I took occasion to glorify and reverence the admirable wisdom of the Most High. If transitory labors and sufferings are accepted with joy and serenity of heart they spiritualize the creature, elevate him, and furnish him with a divine insight by which the soul begins to esteem affliction at its proper value, and soon finds consolation and the blessings of mortification and freedom from disorderly passions. This is the teaching of the school of the Redeemer, hidden from the inhabitants of Babylon and lovers of vanity (Mt. 11:25). I desire thee also to imitate me in respecting the priests and ministers of the Lord, who in the new law hold a much higher dignity than in the old, since the divine Word has now united Himself with human nature and become the eternal High Priest according to the order of Melchisedech (Ps. 109:4). Listen to their words and instructions as God requires, whose place they take. Consider the power and authority given them in the Gospels, where it is said (Lk. 10:16): *Who heareth you, heareth Me; who obeys you, obeys Me.* Strive after the perfection they teach thee. Ponder and meditate without intermission upon what my most holy Son suffered, so thy soul may be a participant in his sorrows. Let the pious memory of his sufferings engender in thee such a disgust and abhorrence of all earthly pleasures that thou despise and forget all that is visible, and instead follow the Author of eternal life (Mt. 19:27).