

CHAPTER IV

At Twelve Years of Age the Child Jesus Goes with His Parents to Jerusalem, and He Conceals Himself from Them in the Temple.

35. As I have said, Jesus, Mary and Joseph repeated their visit to the temple at the Pasch of the Unleavened Bread every year. Also when the divine Child was twelve years old, and when it was time to allow the splendors of his inaccessible and divine light to shine forth, they went to the temple for this feast (Lk. 2:42). This solemnity of the Unleavened Bread lasted seven days according to the command of the divine law (Dt. 16:8), and the more solemn days were the first and the last. For this reason our heavenly Pilgrims remained in Jerusalem during the whole week, spending their time in acts of worship and devotion as the rest of the Jews, though because of the sacraments connected with each of them their worship and devotion was entirely different and greatly exalted above that of the others. The Blessed Mother and her holy spouse received during these days favors and blessings beyond the conception of the human mind.

36. Having thus spent all seven days of the solemnity they departed for Nazareth (Ib. 43). When his parents departed from Jerusalem and were pursuing their way homeward, the child Jesus withdrew from them without their knowledge. For this purpose the Lord availed Himself of the separation of the men and women which had become customary among the pilgrims for reasons of decency as well as for greater recollection during their return homeward. The children who accompanied their parents were taken in charge either by the men or the women without distinction, since their company with either was a matter of indifference. Thus it happened that St. Joseph could easily suppose the child Jesus had remained with his most holy Mother (Ib. 44), with whom He generally remained. The thought that She would go without Him was far from his mind, since the heavenly Queen loved and delighted in Him more than any other creature human or angelic. The great Lady did not have so many reasons for supposing her most holy Son was in the company of St. Joseph, but the Lord himself so diverted her thoughts by holy and divine contemplations that She did not notice his absence at first. When afterwards She became aware of not being accompanied by her sweetest and beloved Son, She supposed the most glorious St. Joseph had taken Him along and the Lord accompanied his foster father for his consolation.

37. Thus assured, most holy Mary and St. Joseph pursued their journey home for an entire day as St. Luke tells us (Ib.). As the pilgrims proceeded onward they gradually thinned out, each taking his own direction and joining again with his wife or family. Most holy Mary and her spouse found themselves at length in the place where they had agreed to meet on the first evening after leaving Jerusalem. When the great Lady saw the Child was not with St. Joseph, and when the holy Patriarch found He was not with his Mother, they were both nearly muted with alarm and amazement, without being able to speak for a long time. Governed in their judgment by their most profound humility, both felt overwhelmed with self-reproach for what they deemed their failure to watch over their most holy Son, and thus blamed themselves for his absence, for neither of them had any suspicion of the mysterious manner in which He had been able to elude their vigilance. After awhile they somewhat recovered from their astonishment, and with deepest sorrow took counsel with each other regarding what was to be done (Lk. 2:45). The loving Mother said to St. Joseph: "My spouse and my master, my heart cannot rest if we do not return with all diligence to search for my most holy Son." This they proceeded to do, beginning their search among their relations and friends, yet none could give them any information regarding

Him nor alleviate their sorrow; on the contrary, their sorrow was increased anew by the answers that none of them had seen Him on the road from Jerusalem.

38. The afflicted Mother then turned to her holy Angels. Those who carried the escutcheons inscribed with the most Holy Name of Jesus, of which I spoke at the Circumcision (*Inc.* 523), had accompanied the Lord, while the other Angels still remained with the purest Mother. This was the order maintained whenever the Son separated from the Mother. These, who numbered ten thousand, She asked saying: "My friends and companions, thou well knowest the cause of my sorrow. In such bitter affliction I beseech thee to be my consolation, giving me information regarding my Beloved so I may seek and find Him (*Cant.* 3:2-3). Give some relief to my wounded heart, which absent from its Good and Life bounds from its place in search of Him." The holy Angels knew the will of the Lord in giving his most holy Mother that occasion of great merit, and that it was not time to manifest the sacrament, though they never lost sight of their Creator and our Redeemer; hence they answered by speaking to Her other words of consolation without telling Her the location of her most holy Son or what He was doing. By this response, and the new doubts which it caused to the most prudent Lady, her concerns, tears and sighs grew with highest sorrow, urging Her to search with diligence not for the lost drachma like the woman of the Gospel (*Lk.* 15:8), but for the entire Treasure of heaven and earth.

39. The Mother of Wisdom then began to discuss within her Heart the different possibilities. The first thought which presented itself to Her was the fear lest Archelaus, imitating the cruelty of his father Herod, had obtained notice of the presence of Jesus and taken Him prisoner. Although She knew from Holy Scriptures and revelations, and by her conversations with her most holy Son and Teacher, that the time for his Passion and Death had not yet come (*Jn.* 7:30), and the king would not take away his life, yet She was filled with dread at the thought that they had taken Him prisoner and might molest Him. In her most profound humility She also had misgivings lest perchance She had in any way displeased Him by her conduct and therefore deserved that He leave Her and take up his abode in the desert with his precursor St. John. At other times, addressing her absent Love, She exclaimed: "Sweet Love and glory of my soul, by the desire Thou hast to suffer for men, and in thy immense charity, Thou shalt avoid no labor or hardship (*Heb.* 10:5); rather I suspect, my Master and Lord, Thou dost seek them on purpose (*Is.* 53:7). Where shall I go? Where shall I find Thee, Light of my eyes (*Tob.* 10:4)? Dost Thou desire my life to falter by the sword which divides it from thy presence? Yet I do not wonder, my Good, that Thou dost chastise with thy absence one who did not know how to retain the benefit of thy company. Why, my Lord, hast Thou enriched me with the sweet delights of thy childhood if I am so soon to lose thy loving assistance and instruction? Yet woe is me!, for since I cannot merit having Thee as my Son and enjoying thy presence, I confess I owe Thee gratitude for the favor of condescending to accept me as thy slave! Yet if being thy unworthy Mother this title can be of any avail in finding Thee, my God and my highest Good, do Thou, O Lord, permit it, and grant me what I lack in order to be worthy to find Thee, so I may live with Thee in the desert, or wherever Thou shalt go, to sufferings, labors and tribulations. My Master, my soul desires to merit at least in part to share thy sorrows and torments, to die if I do not find Thee, or to live in thy service and presence. When thy divine Being hid Thyself from my interior the presence of thy amiable humanity remained with me, and though Thou wast austere and less endearing to me than accustomed, yet I could throw myself at thy feet; but now I am without this happiness, and the Sun which enlightened me has been completely hidden from me, leaving me only anguish and groans. Ah life of my soul, what sighs from my inmost heart can I send Thee! Yet I am not worthy of thy clemency, since my eyes find no traces of Thee."

40. Thus this most sincere Dove persevered in her tears and groans without cessation or rest, without sleeping or eating anything for three whole days. Although the ten thousand Angels accompanied Her in corporeal forms and witnessed her affliction and sorrow, yet they did not manifest where to find her lost Child. On the third day the great Queen resolved to seek Him in the desert where St. John was, for since She saw no indications that Archelaus had taken Him prisoner She began to believe more firmly that her most holy Son was with St. John. When She desired to execute this determination and begin walking toward the desert the holy Angels detained Her, urging Her not to undertake the journey since the incarnate Word was not there. She wanted also to go to Bethlehem in the hope of finding Him in the cave of the Nativity, but the holy Angels likewise prevented it, telling Her that He was not so far away. Although the Blessed Mother heard these answers and well perceived the holy Angels knew the whereabouts of the child Jesus, She was so considerate and reserved in her humility and prudence that She gave no response, nor asked where She could find Him, for She understood they withheld this information by the command of the Lord; with such magnanimous reverence did the Queen of the Angels treat the sacraments of the Most High and of his ministers and ambassadors (II Mach. 2:9). This was one of the occasions in which the greatness of her queenly and magnanimous Heart was made manifest.

41. Not all the sorrows suffered by all the martyrs ever reached the height of the sorrows of most holy Mary in this trial; nor will the patience, resignation and tolerance of this Lady ever be equaled, nor can they, for the loss of her most holy Son was greater to Her than the loss of all of creation, and her awareness, love and appreciation of Him were beyond all imaginable measure. Her doubt was very great, since She did not know the cause of the loss as I have already said; moreover, during these three days the Lord left Her to her natural resources of nature and grace, deprived of special privileges and favors, for with the exception of the sight and conversation of the holy Angels He suspended all the other consolations and blessings so constantly vouchsafed to her most holy soul. From all this we can surmise what sorrow filled the loving Heart of the heavenly Mother. But, O prodigy of sanctity, prudence, fortitude and perfection!, in such unheard-of affliction and sorrow She was not disturbed, nor lost her interior or exterior peace, nor did She entertain a thought of anger or indignation, nor allowed Herself any improper movement or expression, nor fell into any excess of grief or annoyance as is so common in great affliction with other children of Adam, who allow all their passions and faculties to be disarranged, yea even in small difficulties. But the Queen of virtues labored in all this in celestial harmony and consonance; though her sorrow was great without comparison and had pierced her inmost Heart, She did not fail in reverence and in the praise of the Lord, nor ceased in her prayers and petitions for the human race and for the finding of her most holy Son.

42. With this heavenly wisdom and with greatest diligence She sought Him for three successive days, roaming through the streets of the city, asking different persons and describing to the daughters of Jerusalem the marks of her Beloved, searching the byways and open squares of the city, thereby fulfilling what was recorded in the Canticles of Solomon (3:2). Some of the women asked Her what were the distinctive marks of her lost and only Son, and She answered with the words of the Spouse given on her behalf: *My Beloved is white and ruddy, chosen out of thousands* (Ib. 5:10). One of the women, hearing Her thus describe Him, said: "This Child with those same features came yesterday to my door to ask for alms and I gave some to Him, and his amiability and beauty have stolen my heart. And when I gave Him alms I felt within myself sweet and intense compassion upon seeing a Child so gracious in poverty and without help." This was the first news the sorrowful Mother heard of her Onlybegotten in Jerusalem. Being a

little relieved in her sorrow She pursued her quest and met other persons who spoke of Him in like manner. Guided by this information She directed her steps to the hospital of the city, thinking that among the afflicted She would find the Spouse and Architect of poverty (Mt. 5:40) among his own legitimate brethren and friends. Inquiring at that place She was informed that a Child of that description had paid his visits to the inmates, leaving some alms and speaking words of much consolation to the afflicted.

43. The report of these doings of her Beloved caused sentiments of most sweet and tender affection in the Heart of the heavenly Lady, which She sent forth from her inmost Heart as messengers to her absent and hidden Son. Then the thought struck Her that since He was not with the poor He no doubt was in attendance in the temple as the house of God and of prayer. The holy Angels encouraged Her and said: "Our Queen and Lady, the hour of thy consolation is near. Soon shalt Thou see the Light of thy eyes; hasten thy footsteps and go to the temple." The glorious patriarch St. Joseph at this moment again met his Spouse, for in order to increase their chances of finding the divine Child they had separated in different directions. By another Angel he had now been likewise advised to proceed to the temple. All three days he had suffered incomparable and excessive affliction and sorrow, hastening from one place to another, sometimes with his heavenly Spouse, sometimes without Her, and with the gravest sorrow. He would have put his life in evident danger if the hand of the Lord had not comforted him and if the most prudent Lady had not consoled him and taken care that he take some food and rest sometimes from his great fatigue, since his true and tender affection for the divine Child caused him to vehemently and anxiously search for Him without remembering to take nourishment sufficient for life and the support of nature. Following the advice of the holy Princes the most pure Mary and St. Joseph hastened to the temple, where happened what I shall relate in the next chapter.

*INSTRUCTION GIVEN TO ME BY THE QUEEN
OF HEAVEN, MOST HOLY MARY.*

44. My daughter, by oft-repeated experience mortals know they do not lose without sorrow that which they once have loved and possessed with delight. This well-known and proven truth should teach and reprove the worldly for the lack of love they have for their God and Creator; for while there are so many who lose Him, there are so few who sorrow over this loss, since they never merit to love Him or possess Him by the force of grace.* And since they do not sorrow upon losing the good which they neither love nor possess, for this reason, having lost Him, they neglect to seek Him. But there is a great difference in these losses or absences of the true Good; for it is not the same for God to hide Himself from the soul for the trial of its love and increase of its virtue, as for Him to withdraw from the soul in punishment for its sins. The first is an artifice of divine love, and a means of communicating Himself more abundantly to the creature one who desires and merits it; the second is a just chastisement administered by the divine indignation. In the first kind of absence the Lord humbles the soul by holy fear (Prov. 28:14) and filial love, leaving it in the doubt it has regarding the cause. Although its conscience does not reprehend it, the tender and loving heart knows the danger, feels the loss, and comes, as the Wise Man says, to be blessed; for then it always dreads and is fearful of such a loss, and man knows not if he is worthy of the love or abhorrence of God (Eccles. 9:1), and all is reserved for the end. In the

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

meantime in this mortal life things commonly happen to the just and the sinner without difference (Ib. 2).

45. This is what the Wise Man says is the very great and dreadful danger among all things which happen under the sun (Ib. 3); for the impious and reprobate are full of malice and hardness of heart with false and dangerous security, seeing that without distinction *the same things happen to all men*, and that no one can know with certainty who is chosen or reprobate (Ib. 12), the friend or enemy of God, the just or the sinner, who deserves hate and who deserves love. Yet if men would have recourse to conscience without disturbance or deceit, it would answer each one with the truth which is necessary for him to know (Lk. 12:58); for when it cries out against the sins he has committed, it would be apathetic foolishness not to attribute to himself the evils and damages which he suffers, and not recognize himself forsaken, without the presence of grace, having entirely lost the highest Good. And if he has right reason, the greatest indicator is not to feel with inmost sorrow the lack or loss of spiritual joy and the effects of grace; for the loss of this feeling in a soul created for the purpose of eternal happiness is a strong indication that the soul neither desires nor loves this happiness; for he does not seek it diligently (Lk. 15:8) in order to arrive at some assurance and prudent security, which can be attained in this mortal life, that he has not lost the highest Good through his own fault.

46. I lost my most holy Son with regard to his bodily presence; and although I had hope of finding Him, love and doubt concerning the cause of his absence gave me no rest until I found Him again. This I desire thee to imitate, my dearest, whether thou dost lose Him through thy own fault or by his artifice. And so this loss will not be for thy punishment, thou must seek Him with such vehemence* that neither tribulation, nor distress, nor necessity, nor danger, nor persecution, nor the sword, nor height nor depth can separate thee from thy Good (Rom. 8:35); for if thou art faithful, as thou must be, and dost not wish to lose Him, there is no power which can deprive thee of Him, neither Angels, nor Principalities, nor Powers, nor any other creature (Ib. 38-39). So strong is the bond of his love and its chains that nothing can burst them except the creature's own will.

* cf. Ps. 26:8; Epistle, Tuesday of the Second Week of Lent [Ed.]