

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, 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 her 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 onwards 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 almost speechless with amazement and admiration for quite awhile. Both, governed in their judgment by their most profound humility, felt overwhelmed with self reproach at their remissness in watching 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 a time 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 unless we return with all haste to Jerusalem in order to seek 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, you well know the cause of my sorrow. In this bitter affliction be my consolation and give me some information concerning my Beloved so I may seek and find Him (Cant. 3:2-3). Give some relief to my wounded heart, which torn from its happiness and life bounds from its place in search of Him.” The holy Angels, though they never lost sight of the Creator and Redeemer, were aware the Lord desired to furnish his Mother this occasion of great merit, and that it was not yet time to reveal the secret to Her, answered by speaking to Her words of consolation without manifesting to Her the whereabouts and the doings of their Lord. 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, Thou art impelled by thy desire of suffering for men and by thy immense charity to avoid no labor or pain (Heb. 10:5); rather I suspect, my Master and Lord, Thou dost seek it on purpose (Is. 53:7). Whither shall I go and whither shall I find Thee, Light of my eyes (Tob. 10:4)? Dost Thou desire to deprive me of life by the sword of severance from thy presence? Yet I do not wonder, O my highest Good: Thou dost chastise by thy absence one who did not know how to profit by thy company. Why, O my Lord, hast Thou enriched me with the delights of thy childhood if I am so soon to lose the assistance of thy loving instruction? But woe is me!, since not being worthy to retain and enjoy Thee as my Son, I must confess I am obliged to thank Thee even for the favor of condescending to accept me as thy slave! If the privilege of being thy unworthy Mother can be of any avail in finding Thee, my God and my highest Good, do Thou, O Lord, permit it, and make me worthy of again finding Thee, that I may go with Thee into the desert, or wherever Thou shalt go, to sufferings, labors and tribulations. My Lord, 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, at least thy amiable humanity remained; and though Thou wast austere and less endearing to me than accustomed, yet I could throw myself at thy feet. But now this happiness is taken away from me, and I have lost sight entirely of the Sun which enlightens me, left only to groans and sighs. Ah Love of my soul, what sighs from my inmost heart can I send Thee! But 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 was about to execute her resolve and was on the point of departing for 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 this the holy Angels likewise prevented, telling Her that He was not so far off. 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; her consciousness, 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 failed not 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 the open squares of the city, and 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 grace and beauty have ravished my heart. And when I gave Him alms I felt myself overcome by compassion to see a Child so gracious in poverty and need." 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 Originator 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 sweetest and most tender affection in the Heart of the heavenly Lady, which She sent forth from her inmost Heart as messengers to her lost and absent Son. Then the thought struck Her that since He was not with the poor He no doubt tarried 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 at hand. 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. During all these 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. He was in serious danger of losing his life during this time if the hand of the Lord had not strengthened him and if the most prudent Lady had not consoled him and taken care that he take some food and rest for awhile from his great fatigue, since his true and tender affection for the Child God 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 what once they have possessed with delight. This truth, so well established, should convince men what little love they have for their God and Creator, since among the many who lose Him there are so few who heartily grieve at this loss, and thereby show they have never possessed or loved Him with a love flowing from grace. Just as they fail to grieve at losing the highest Good, whom they do not hold in loving possession, so they also fail to seek after their God when they have lost Him. But there is a great difference in the manner in which men lose sight of their highest Good, for it is not the same to lose sight of God for the purpose of being tried in virtue and love as to lose sight of Him in punishment for sins committed. The first is a contrivance of divine love and a means of communicating itself more abundantly to the one who longs for it and merits it; the second is a just punishment for outrages committed against the Divinity. In the first kind of absence the Lord humiliates the soul by holy fear (Prov. 28:14) and filial love, leaving it uncertain whether it has given cause for his withdrawal. Although its conscience does not reprehend it, the tender and loving heart knows its danger, feels the loss, and thus, as the Wise Man says, is blessed, for it then lives in constant fear and dread of such a loss, knowing that until the end of his life *man knoweth not whether he be worthy or love or hatred* (Eccles. 9:1) in the sight of God. During their mortal existence the just man and the sinner commonly share the same good and evil lot without much distinction (Ib. 2).

45. This is the great evil which the Wise Man mentions among the happenings under the sun (Ib. 3), that the impious and the wicked harden their hearts in their malice and false security, seeing that the same mishaps befall both themselves and others, and that no one can tell with certainty who are the chosen or the reprobate (Ib. 12), the friends or enemies of God, the just or the sinners, those who are worthy of love and those who are worthy of hatred. But if each man would objectively and without deceit appeal to his conscience, it would answer each one truthfully what he must know (Lk. 12:58), for when it cries out against sins committed one would be foolish not to attribute the evils and adversities to oneself, or fail to see oneself forsaken by grace and deprived of the highest Good. Since each one is free to reason, the greatest source of misgiving should be to be unmoved by the loss or the cessation of the spiritual joy and effects of grace, for the lack of this misgiving in a soul created and destined for eternal happiness is a strong indication that the soul neither desires nor loves this happiness, and therefore it is a sign that it does not seek it in earnest (Lk. 15:8) in order to arrive at that which can be attained in this mortal life, a certain confidence and prudent security of possessing the highest Good and not having lost Him by one's own fault.

46. I was deprived of the bodily presence of my most holy Son, and though I was in hope of again finding Him, yet in my great love the uncertainty as to the cause of his withdrawal gave me no rest until I found Him. In this I desire thee, my dearest, to imitate me, whether thou dost lose Him through thy own fault or by the disposition of his own will. So great must be thy dread of losing Him through thy fault that neither tribulation, nor trouble, nor necessity, nor danger, nor persecution, nor the sword, neither height nor depth, should ever withhold thee from seeking after thy God,* for if thou art faithful as thou should be, and if thou dost not wish to lose Him, neither the angels, nor the principalities, nor the powers, nor any other creature can ever deprive thee of Him (Rom. 8:35). So strong are the bonds of his love and its chains that nothing can burst them except thy own free will.

* cf. Is. 55:6; Epistle, Tuesday of the First Week of Lent [Ed.]