

CHAPTER XIII

Most Holy Mary Reaches Thirty-Three Years of Age, and Her Virginal Body Remains Permanently in that State; She Supports Her Most Holy Son and St. Joseph by Her Labor.

144. Our great Queen and Lady occupied Herself in the divine exercises and mysteries which I have pointed out (but could not fully describe) in the preceding chapters, in particular after her most holy Son reached his twelfth year. In the course of time our Savior passed the period of his adolescence at eighteen and his Blessed Mother, according to the dates of his Incarnation and Birth given above (*Inc.* 138, 475), reached her perfect growth in her thirty-third year. I call it that because according to the parts in which the life of man is commonly divided (currently there are six or seven), the age of thirty-three years is that of full bodily growth and perfection, being the end of youthful vigor, or as others would have it the beginning of it. Whatever opinion is accepted, that is the end of the natural perfection of the body and it lasts only a short time, for immediately corrupted nature, never remaining in the same state (*Job.* 14:2), begins to decline, like the moon which begins to lessen as soon as it has reached fullness. From that time on the body does not grow in length, nor can the increase in bulk be called a perfection, being rather a defect of nature. For this reason Christ our Lord died at the completion of his thirty-third year, for his most ardent love induced Him to wait only until his body had attained its perfect growth and vigor and was in all respects most capable of bringing the perfect gifts of nature and grace to this sacrifice; not that divine grace was in need of any growth in Him, but so his human nature would correspond with the perfection of grace, and nothing would be lacking even exteriorly to the completeness of his sacrifice for mankind. In accordance with this it is said the Almighty created Adam and Eve in the condition of a man and woman at the age of thirty-three years. Of course it is true that in the first and second age of the world, when the life of man was much longer, in dividing the periods of human life (whether six or seven parts, or more, or less) many more years would have to be counted for each period before the time of David than after that time, when old age begins at seventy years (*Ps.* 89:10).

145. When therefore the Queen of heaven arrived at her thirty-third year her virginal body had attained full natural growth, so well proportioned and beautiful that She was the admiration not only of human nature but of the angelic spirits themselves. She had grown in size and stature to the most perfect proportion in all the parts of her body, and most strikingly resembled her divine Son in features and complexion when later on He arrived at that age, of course always taking into account that Christ was the most perfect man while his Mother was the most perfect woman. Other mortals, because of the decline of the natural humors and temperature, ordinarily begin to deteriorate and gradually approach decay as far as their body is concerned; the exquisite balance of bodily humors is disturbed and the earthly ones begin to predominate more and more, the hair begins to whiten, the countenance to wrinkle, the blood to cool, some of the strength to weaken, and the whole human frame, in spite of the greatest care, begins to decline toward old age and corruption. But in most holy Mary it was not so, for the wonderful beauty and strength which She had attained at the age of thirty-three years remained unchanged, and when She had reached her seventieth year, as I shall relate later on (*Cor.* 736), She had the same integrity as at thirty-three, with the same forces and disposition of her virginal body.

146. The great Lady was well aware of this special privilege conceded to Her by the Most High, and She rendered Him most humble gratitude. She understood also it was granted to Her so the likeness of her most holy Son would always be preserved in Her, though with the

differences consequent upon her different nature and longer life, for the Lord attained full bodily growth at thirty-three years, while She retained it during her much longer life. St. Joseph, although he was not so very old at the time when the Mistress of the world reached her thirty-third year, was much broken and worn out as far as his body was concerned, for his continual cares, his journeys, and his incessant labors for the sustenance of his Spouse and of the Lord had weakened him much more than his years. This was so ordained by the Lord, who desiring to lead him on to the practice of patience and other virtues permitted him to suffer sickness and pain (as I shall relate in the following chapter). His most prudent Spouse, knowing that he was much weakened, and always having loved and served him better than any spouse ever did her husband, spoke to him and said: "My spouse and my master, I am deeply obliged to you for the faithful labors, watchfulness and care thou hast bestowed on my welfare, for in the sweat of thy brow thou hast until now supported me, thy servant, and my most holy Son, the true God. In this thy solicitude thou hast spent thy strength and the best part of thy health and thy life in protecting me and attending upon my welfare. From the hands of the Almighty thou shalt receive the reward of thy works and the blessings of sweetness which thou dost deserve (Ps. 20:4). But now I beseech thee, my master, rest henceforth from thy labors, since thy impaired strength is not any more equal to them. I desire to be grateful and to labor from now on for thy service and for the sustenance which the Lord shalt give us."

147. The Saint listened to the reasoning of his most sweet Spouse with abundant tears of most humble acknowledgment and consolation. Although he at first earnestly entreated Her to be allowed to continue always in his labors, yet at last he yielded to her request and obeyed his Spouse and Mistress of the world. From that time on he rested from the hard labor of his hands by which he had earned a livelihood for all three. They gave away the carpenter tools as an alms, not wishing to have anything superfluous or useless in their house and family. Being thus at leisure, St. Joseph occupied himself entirely in the contemplation of the mysteries of which he was the guardian and in the exercise of the virtues. Since he had the happiness and good fortune of continually enjoying the sight and the conversation of the divine Wisdom incarnate, and of She who was his Mother, this man of God reached such a height of sanctity that, his heavenly Spouse excepted, no one ever surpassed him, and he far outdistanced all other creatures. Since the Queen of heaven Herself, as well as her most holy Son, attended upon him and nursed him in his sickness, consoling and sustaining him with such great punctuality, there are no words sufficiently expressive of the humility, reverence and love which all this caused in the simple and grateful heart of this man of God. He thus became the admiration and joy of the angels and the pleasure and delight of the Most High.

148. Thenceforth the Lady took upon Herself the task of supporting by her work her most holy Son and her spouse, for such was the will of the eternal Wisdom in order to raise Her to the very pinnacle of all virtues and perfections, and in order to furnish an example for the confusion of the daughters and sons of Adam and Eve. The Lord set up for us as a model this strong Woman, clothed with beauty and fortitude. At this age of thirty-three years She was to show Herself girded with strength and ready to extend her hands to the poor, purchasing the field and cultivating the vineyard by her own labor to bring forth its fruits. *The heart of her husband trusted in Her* (as it says in the Proverbs [31:11]), and not only that of her husband St. Joseph, but also that of her Son, the true Godman, the Teacher of the poor and the Poor of the poor, and they were not deceived. The great Queen began to busy Herself much more in spinning and weaving linen and wool, thus mysteriously fulfilling all that Solomon says about Her in chapter XXXI of the Proverbs (10ff.). But since I have explained this chapter of Scriptures at the end of

the first Part, I shall not repeat it here, although much of what I said there pertains to this period of her life when both interiorly and exteriorly She executed it in action.

149. The Lord was not lacking in ability to provide for his bodily living and that of his Blessed Mother and St. Joseph, since not in bread alone does man live and is sustained (Mt. 4:4); He could have created it by his mere word, as He himself assures us.* He could have each day miraculously created the necessary food, but then the world would have been deprived of this spectacle of his most holy Mother, Mistress of all creation, laboring for their sustenance, and the Virgin herself would have been deprived of the reward due to these meritorious works. All was arranged by the Teacher of our salvation with admirable providence for the glory of our Queen and for our instruction. Her diligence and care in these employments cannot be expressed in words. She labored much, and because She always lived in retirement She was assisted by that most fortunate woman of whom I have spoken before (*Inc.* 227, 423). This woman assumed some of the labor of the great Queen and performed the necessary errands; yet our Lady never used any command when seeking her assistance, but asked and supplicated her with the utmost humility, always seeking to find out her wishes by asking her whether she would want or like to do this or that. Her blessed Son, like his heavenly Mother, ate no meat; their nourishment was only fish, fruit and herbs, and these only in the greatest moderation. For St. Joseph She procured flesh meat, and though their necessity and poverty was apparent also in this, yet it was seasoned by the good will and loving kindness with which She served it to her spouse. The diligent Lady slept but little, and often She spent the greater part of the night in work, for the Lord now permitted Her to spend more time in such employment than in Egypt (*Inc.* 658). Sometimes it happened that with all her diligence and labor She could not earn what was necessary, for St. Joseph now had need of more expensive nourishment and clothes than before. At such times Christ our Lord made use of his almighty power in multiplying what was in their possession, or in commanding the Angels to bring the necessaries from elsewhere.† But more frequently He miraculously enabled his most holy Mother to accomplish much in a short time by the labor of her hands, and thus multiply its results.

INSTRUCTION OF MARY MOST HOLY, THE QUEEN OF HEAVEN.

150. My daughter, in what thou hast written of my labors thou hast received a most exalted doctrine for thy imitation and direction, yet in order for thee not to forget it I shall now give thee a summary of it. I desire thee to imitate me in three virtues which thou shalt find in what thou hast written; they are the virtues of prudence, charity and justice, so little taken notice of by mortals. By prudence thou must anticipate the necessities of thy neighbor and the means of assisting them as far as possible in thy state. By charity thou must be moved to diligently and lovingly remedy their needs. Justice teaches thee it is an obligation thus to act, since thou art capable and dost desire to assist the needy one in what he desires. For those without sight thou must use thine own for them (Job 29:15); those without hearing thou must instruct; and for those without hands thou must use thine own in serving and laboring for them. Although because of thy state of life thou must practice this doctrine principally and continually in a spiritual way, yet I desire thee to take it to heart also as far as demanded by the temporal and bodily wants of thy neighbor, always striving to be most faithful in imitating me, for I also provided for the

* cf. Mt. 6:25-26 [Ed.]

† cf. Mt. 6:33 [Ed.]

necessities of my spouse, and held myself ready to serve and support him, deeming myself obliged thereto, and I fulfilled this obligation with ardent charity until he died. Although the Lord had given him to me for my support, I faithfully provided for him by my labors as long as he was unable to perform this task himself. I judged it to be my duty thus to use the strength given to me by the Lord, and would have considered it a great fault not to do so with great courtesy and sincerity.

151. The children of the Church pay no attention to this example, and thus among them has been introduced a perverse impiety which greatly inclines the just Judge to chastise them severely, for though all mortals, not only since the first sin by which all incurred work as a punishment (Job 5:7), but also from the very first beginning, were created in order to work (Gen. 2:15), nevertheless work is not evenly distributed among men. The powerful, the rich, and those whom the world calls lords and nobles all try to exempt themselves from this common law and throw this burden upon the humble and the poor of human society. The rich keep up their pride and ostentation by the labor and sweat of the poor, and the powerful draw their strength from the weakness and helplessness of the lowly. In many of the proud by their haughtiness this perversity reaches such extremes that they begin to think all this is due to them, and they despise, oppress, and tread underfoot the poor (James 2:6). They falsely suppose that others are created only in order so they themselves can enjoy leisure and delight and all the goods of the world, and in addition to this they do not even pay the small wages for these services. In this matter of not paying proper wages to the poor and to the servants, and in similar matters, thou shalt find great crimes against the order and will of the Almighty. But let it be known that just as the rich pervert justice and reason, and refuse to take their share in human labor, so also will mercy be inverted for them (Wis. 6:7) and be showered upon the despised and lowly. Those who in their pride gave themselves up to contemptible idleness shall be chastised with the demons whom they have imitated therein.

152. Thou, dearest, take heed against such deception. Let the advantages of earnest labor be always before thy eyes according to my example. Separate thyself from the children of Belial (II Par. 13:7), who so idly seek the applause of vanity (Ps. 4:3) in order to labor in vain. Do not judge thyself preeminent nor superior, but a slave of thy subjects, more lowly and humble, diligently serving them all without distinction. If necessary be ready to labor for their sustenance, and be convinced this is incumbent upon thee not only as their superior but also because the religious are thy sisters, daughters of the heavenly Father and creatures of the Lord thy Spouse. Since thou hast received more than all the rest from his liberal hand, thou art also obliged to labor more than they. Relieve the weak and ailing from bodily labor and do their work thyself. I desire thee not only to avoid charging others with work which thou canst perform thyself and which belongs to thee, but rather assume as much as possible that of all the rest, deeming thyself their inferior and their servant, as I desire thee always to consider thyself. Since thou canst not do all thyself, and since it is necessary for thee to distribute bodily labor among thy subjects, I exhort thee to observe good order and equity, not putting more labor upon those who are too humble or weak to object; on the contrary, I desire thee to humiliate those who are of a haughty and proud spirit and are unwilling to occupy themselves in hard work. However, this must be done without exasperating them and with a gentle firmness, helping them to suppress their lukewarmness and lack of subjection by placing upon them the yoke of holy obedience in accordance with their profession. In doing this thou dost confer upon them the greatest blessing, and only fulfill thy own obligation; hence thou must see to it that they understand thee in that way. All this thou shalt attain if thou make no personal distinctions and assign to each one the

work which she can do and what is appropriate to her, obliging and compelling each one with equity and justice to abhor idleness and laxity, and let them see thee engaged in the hardest and most difficult work; thereby thou shalt gain a humble liberty of commanding them. But command no one to do what thou canst do thyself, in order to enjoy the fruit and the reward of labor in imitation of me, obeying what I admonish and command thee.