

CHAPTER XIV

The Infirmities which St. Joseph Suffered in the Last Years of His Life, and how His Spouse the Queen of Heaven Served Him during that Time.

153. A common defect in all of us who are called to the light and the profession of holy faith in the school of Christ our Lord is that of looking upon Him too much as our Redeemer and not sufficiently as our Teacher in our sufferings (Lk. 24:26).^{*} We all desire to reap the fruit of salvation and enter the portals of grace and glory, but we do not with similar zeal seek to follow Him on the Way of the Cross by which He entered and upon which He invites us to attain eternal glory (Mt. 16:24). Though as Catholics we do not fall into such insane errors as the heretics, for we know and profess that without exertion and labor there can be no reward or crown (II Tim. 2:5), and that it is a highly sacrilegious blasphemy to avail ourselves of the merits of Christ our Lord in order to sin without restraint and without fear, nevertheless as far as truly practicing the works inculcated by faith some of the children of the Church differ little from the children of darkness, for they look upon difficult and painful works as unnecessary for the following of Christ and for participation in his glory.

154. Let us throw off this error in our practice and understand well that suffering was not only for Christ our Lord but also for us, that if He suffered labors and death as the Redeemer of the world He suffered them also as our Teacher who taught us and invited us as his friends to carry his cross, and this to such an extent that his nearest friends receive the greatest share of suffering, and no one can enter into heaven (if it can be merited) without the price of labors.[†] In imitation of his most holy Mother and the Apostles, Martyrs, Confessors and Virgins, all the followers of Christ have travelled the path to heaven by labors, and those who have been most prepared for suffering have obtained so much the more abundant reward and the higher crown. It might be objected that our Lord was at the same time God and man, and that if He has given us the most conspicuous and wonderful example of suffering He did it more in order to be admired than to be imitated. But this is only a bold and daring pretense on our part, for He can meet this objection with the example of his Mother, our most pure and innocent Queen, with that of her blessed spouse St. Joseph, and of so many men and women, weak and deficient as we ourselves, who were less guilty but who have imitated Him and followed Him on the Way of the Cross. The Lord did not suffer only to excite our admiration but so we could imitate his example, and He did not let his being true God impede Him in suffering and feeling labors, but allowed sorrow and suffering to overwhelm Him in proportion to his innocence and sinlessness.

155. Along this royal road the Lord led the spouse of his most holy Mother, St. Joseph, whom He loved above all the sons of men. In order to increase his merits and crown before the time of his meriting would come to an end, He visited him in the last years of his life with certain sicknesses such as fever, violent headaches, and very painful rheumatisms, which greatly afflicted and weakened him. In the midst of these infirmities he was suffering from another source, more sweet but extremely painful, namely from the fire of his ardent love, which was so vehement that the flights and ecstasies of his most pure soul would often have burst the bonds of his body if the Lord who vouchsafed them had not strengthened and comforted him against these

^{*} cf. also I Peter 2:21 [Ed.]

[†] cf. *Transfixion* 527 [Ed.]

agonies of love. In these sweet excesses the Lord allowed him to suffer until his death, and by the natural weakness of a body so emaciated and debilitated this exercise came to be the source of incomparable merits for the happy Saint, not only because of the effects of the sorrow which he suffered but also because of the love which caused these sufferings.

156. Our great Queen, the Spouse of St. Joseph, was a witness to all these mysteries, and as I have already stated (*Inc.* 368, 381, 394, 404) She knew the whole interior of his soul, being thus rejoiced by the knowledge of having for her spouse a man so holy and so beloved of the Lord. She beheld and comprehended the sincerity and purity of his soul, his burning love, his exalted and heavenly thoughts, and his dovelike patience and meekness in his grievous ailments and exquisite sufferings. She knew he never complained either of these or of any of the other trials, nor ever asked for any relief in his wants and necessities, for he bore all with incomparable equanimity and greatness of soul. While his most prudent Spouse contemplated and weighed all these heroic virtues of St. Joseph, She grew to look upon him with such veneration as cannot ever be properly estimated by anyone. She labored with incredible joy for his support and comfort, and the greatest of his comforts was that She prepared and administered his meals seasonably with her own virginal hands. But since all of her service seemed little in the eyes of the heavenly Lady compared to the necessities of her spouse, She sometimes in her love for him made use of her power as Queen and Mistress of all creation and commanded the food which She administered to him to impart special strength and supply new life to the Saint, the Just* and elect of the Most High.

157. This command of the great Lady, whom all creatures obey, was fulfilled, and when St. Joseph tasted the delicacy which bore these blessings of sweetness and felt their effects, he was accustomed to say to the Queen: “My Lady and Spouse, what celestial food is this which vivifies me, rejoices my senses, restores my strength, and fills my soul and spirit with new delight?” The Empress of heaven served him his meals on bended knees, and when he was much disabled and suffering She took off his shoes in the same posture. At other times She supported him in her arms. Although the humble Saint sought to rouse himself in order to forestall some of these ministrations of his Spouse, he could not altogether prevent them, for She was intimately aware of all his sufferings and weaknesses, and the circumstances and occasions when he needed her assistance. At such times the heavenly nurse always hastened to assist him in his wants. Often also, as the Mistress of Wisdom and of virtue, She comforted him by words of sweetest consolation. In the last three years of his life, when his infirmities increased, our Queen attended upon him day and night, and her only other employment was the service and ministration due to her most holy Son. The Lord sometimes joined and assisted Her in the care of her holy spouse whenever He was not engaged in other necessary works. There was never a sick person, nor will there ever be one, who was so well nursed and comforted. Great was the happiness and worth of this man of God, St. Joseph, for he alone deserved to have Her for his Spouse who was the Spouse of the Holy Ghost.

158. Yet the heavenly Lady was not satisfied with these proofs of her devotion toward holy Joseph, making use of other means for his relief and comfort. Several times She asked the Lord in her ardent charity to impose upon Her the pains suffered by her spouse and release him therefrom. To gain her point She, the Mother and Mistress of sanctity, pleaded before the Most High, alleging that her debt was greater than that of all the earthborn, and since She had not given the proper return She was inferior to them, deserving all their hardships and offering her

* cf. Mt. 1:19 [Ed.]

prepared Heart for all manner of affliction and pain. She pleaded also the sanctity of St. Joseph, his purity, innocence, and the delight of the Lord in this heart made according to that of his Son. She asked many blessings for him and rendered most heartfelt gratitude for having created a man so worthy of his favors, so full of sanctity and rectitude. She invited the holy Angels to give thanks to God for him, and in contemplating the glory and wisdom of the Lord as shown in this man She sang new hymns of praise, since on the one hand She saw the pains and sufferings of her beloved spouse and pitied him and suffered with him, and on the other hand She knew his merits and the delight of the Lord in them, and She rejoiced in the patience of the Saint and magnified the Lord for it. The heavenly Lady exercised different virtues suitable to the occasion, and of such an exalted degree that She excited the admiration of the angelic spirits. Yet it should cause greater admiration to the ignorance of mortals to see that a human creature could give such plenitude of perfection to so many different matters, and that in them the solitude of Martha did not interfere with the contemplation of Mary (Lk. 10:41-2), imitating in this the activity of the supernal spirits, who guard and assist us without losing sight of the Most High (Mt. 18:10). But most pure Mary far excelled them in her attention to God while engaged in bodily labor of which they were incapable. Though She was a child of Adam She lived like a heavenly spirit, occupying the superior part of her being in the exalted exercises of her divine love and employing her inferior faculties in works of charity toward her spouse.

159. It happened on other occasions the merciful Queen, in perceiving the bitterness and severity of the sufferings of St. Joseph, was moved to tender compassion, and She would humbly ask permission of her most holy Son to command the incidental sufferings and their natural causes to suspend their activity, and hence not afflict so much the Just and beloved of God. Since all creatures obeyed the command of their great Lady, her holy spouse was then immediately relieved and rested from his pains, sometimes for a day, sometimes longer, until his ailments, according to the decree of the Almighty, again assumed sway for the increase of his merits. At other times She ordered the holy Angels as their Queen (though not in the form of a command but of a request) to console St. Joseph and comfort him in his sorrows and labors as the frail condition of his body demanded. Thereupon the angelic spirits would appear to St. Joseph in human forms, most beautiful and shining, and begin to speak to him of the Divinity and his infinite perfections. Then with most sweet and harmonious voices they would make celestial music, singing hymns and divine canticles by which they restored his drooping strength and inflamed the love of his purest soul. To rejoice him even more he was specially informed not only of the source of these blessings and divine favors but of the great sanctity of his virginal Spouse, of her singular love and charity in conversing with him and serving him, and of many other excellences and privileges of the great Mistress of the world. All this together caused such effects in St. Joseph, and so raised his merits before God, as no tongue can express nor any human understanding in this life comprehend.

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

160. My daughter, one of the virtuous works most pleasing to the Lord and most fruitful for souls is the loving care of the sick, because by it is fulfilled to a great extent that natural law which requires us to do to our neighbors what we wish them to do to us. In the Gospel this is adduced as one of the works for which the Lord shall give eternal reward to the just (Mt. 25:34ff.), and the failure to exercise this duty is alleged as one of the causes of the eternal damnation of the wicked. In the same place the justice of this retribution is also explained,

namely as men are the children of the eternal Father the Lord considers any good or ill done to our neighbor as done to his own children who represent Him, for so it is customary among human parents. With regard to thyself thou must moreover consider thou art the mother of thy religious and they, just as thou thyself, are spouses of Christ my most holy Son. The fact that they have received from Him fewer blessings should so much the more oblige thee to serve and nurse them in their infirmities. For this reason I have on another occasion told thee thou must consider thyself the infirmarian of all of them as being inferior to them because of thy great obligations (*Inc.* 671). I assign to thee thereby an office which is great in the house of the Lord. In order to fulfill its obligations do not charge others with the work which thou canst do thyself in the service of the sick, and whatever thou canst not do because of the duties of thy office be thou careful in commending to the special care of those who are appointed to discharge these duties by obedience. Besides common charity there are other reasons why religious must be attended to in their ailments with the greatest care and solicitude, namely so their afflictions and necessities will not cause them to long for return to their parental homes and to the world. Be assured that in this way much harm enters the cloister, for human nature is so averse to suffering that rather than feel the lack of necessities it will again face the greatest dangers of the soul.

161. For all this, and in order to succeed in the practice and execution of this doctrine, let the charity which I demonstrated toward my spouse Joseph in his infirmities serve thee as a stimulus and a model. Very tardy is that charity (and even the politeness) which waits until the needy one asks for help; I did not wait, but hastened to assist before I was asked. My charity and attention anticipated the requests of my spouse, and thus I consoled him not only by my services but by my loving solicitude and attention. I shared his sufferings and hardships with heartfelt compassion, but at the same time I praised the Most High and thanked Him for the blessings of affliction conferred on his servant. If sometimes I sought to relieve his pains it was not in order to deprive him of the occasion of meriting, but so he could by this aid excite himself to glorify so much the more the Author of all goodness and holiness, and to these virtues I exhorted and encouraged him. With similar perfection thou must exercise this noble virtue, providing for the needs of the sick and weak, comforting them by thy compassion and words of advice, and doing them all kinds of good services without desiring them to lose the reward of suffering. Let not thy sensible love disturb thee when thy sisters fall sick, though they are those thou dost love or need the most, for thereby many souls both in the world and in religion lose the merit of their labors. The sorrow occasioned by the sight of sickness or danger in their friends disturbs their equanimity, and under the pretense of compassion they begin to complain and refuse to submit themselves to the dispositions of divine Providence. In all these things I have given thee an example, and I desire thee to imitate it perfectly by following my footsteps.