

CHAPTER XV

The Most Happy Death of St. Joseph and what Happened at It, and how Jesus our Savior and Most Holy Mary, Our Lady, Assisted at It.

162. Already eight years St. Joseph had been exercised by his infirmities and sufferings, and his noble soul had been purified more and more each day in the crucible of affliction and divine love. As time passed his bodily strength gradually diminished and he approached the unavoidable end in which the stipend of death is paid by all of us children of Adam (Heb. 9:27). In a similar manner also increased the care and solicitude of his heavenly Spouse, our Queen, assisting and serving him with unbroken punctuality. Perceiving in her exalted wisdom that the day and hour for his departure from this cumbersome earth was very near, the loving Lady went to her blessed Son and said to Him: “Lord and God most high, Son of the eternal Father and Savior of the world, I know by thy divine light the time determined by thy eternal will for the death of thy servant Joseph has arrived. I beseech Thee by thy ancient mercies and infinite goodness to assist him in this hour by the powerful arm of thy Majesty, so his death shall be as precious in thy eyes (Ps. 115:15) as the uprightness of his life was pleasing to Thee, and so he may depart in peace with the certain hope of the eternal reward to be given to him on the day in which by thy condescension Thou shalt open the gates of heaven for all the believers. Be mindful, my Son, of the love and humility of thy servant, the summit of his merits and virtues, and the fidelity and solicitude by which the Just Man has supported your Highness and me, thy humble servant, in the sweat of his brow.”

163. Our Savior responded: “My Mother, thy petitions are acceptable to Me, and in my presence the merits of Joseph are pleasing. I shall now assist him and in due time shall assign him a place and seat among the princes of my people (Ps. 112:8), so eminent that he shall be the admiration of the angels and a motive of praise for them and for men. With none of the human born shall I do as with thy spouse.” The great Lady gave thanks to her sweetest Son for this promise, and for nine days and nights before the death of St. Joseph he enjoyed without interruption the company and attendance of Mary or her divine Son. By command of the Lord the holy Angels, three times on each of the nine days, furnished celestial music, mixing their hymns of praise with the benedictions of the sick man; moreover, their humble but most precious dwelling was filled with the sweetest fragrance and odors so wonderful that they comforted not only St. Joseph but invigorated all the numerous persons who happened to come near the house.

164. One day before he died, being entirely inflamed with divine love due to these blessings, he was rapt in an ecstasy which lasted twenty-four hours, the Lord himself supplying him strength and life by miraculous assistance. In this magnificent rapture he saw the divine essence with beatific clarity, and in it was manifested to him without veil that which he had believed by faith, such as the incomprehensible Divinity, the mysteries of the Incarnation and human Redemption, and the Church Militant with the Sacraments which belong to Her. The most blessed Trinity chose and assigned him as the messenger of Christ our Savior to the holy Fathers and Prophets of limbo, and commanded him to prepare them for their issuing forth from this bosom of Abraham to eternal rest and happiness. All this most holy Mary saw reflected in the soul of her divine Son together with all the other mysteries just as they had been made known to her beloved spouse, and for all this the great Princess rendered worthy gratitude to the Lord himself.

165. When St. Joseph issued from this ecstasy his countenance was full of wonderful splendor and beauty and his mind was entirely deified by his vision of the essence of God. He asked his blessed Spouse to give him her benediction, but She requested her divine Son to bless him in her stead, which He did. Then the great Queen of humility, falling on her knees, besought St. Joseph to bless Her as being her husband and head. Not without divine impulse the man of God fulfilled this request for the consolation of his most prudent Spouse. She kissed the hand with which he blessed Her and asked him to salute the just ones of limbo in her name. The most humble Joseph, sealing his life with an act of self-abasement, asked pardon of his heavenly Spouse for all his deficiencies in her service and love, and begged Her to grant him her assistance and intercession in this hour of his passing away. The holy man also rendered most humble gratitude to her Son for all the blessings of his life, and especially for those received during this sickness. The last words which St. Joseph spoke to his Spouse were: "Blessed art Thou among all women, and chosen among all creatures. Let angels and men praise Thee, let all generations know, magnify and exalt thy dignity, and may through Thee be known, adored and exalted the Name of the Most High through all future ages. May He be eternally praised for having created Thee so pleasing in his eyes and in the sight of all the blessed spirits, and I hope to enjoy thy sight in the celestial fatherland."

166. Then the Man of God turned toward Christ our Lord in most profound reverence and desired to kneel before Him; but the most sweet Jesus, coming near him, received him in his arms where, reclining his head upon them, St. Joseph said: "My Lord and God most high, Son of the eternal Father, Creator and Redeemer of the world, give thy eternal blessing to thy slave and the work of thy hands; pardon, most merciful King, the faults which I, as unworthy, have committed in thy service and company. I confess and magnify Thee, and with a melted heart give Thee eternal thanks, since among men Thou didst in thy ineffable condescension choose me as spouse of thy true Mother. Thy own greatness and glory shall be my thanksgiving for all eternity." The Redeemer of the world gave him his benediction and said: "My father,* rest in peace and in the grace of my heavenly Father and mine, and to my Prophets and Saints who await thee in limbo bring the joyful news of the approach of their redemption." At these words of Jesus himself, and reclining in his arms, the most happy St. Joseph expired, and the Lord himself closed his eyes. At the same time the multitude of Angels who attended upon their King and Queen intoned hymns of praise in loud and harmonious voices. By the command of the Lord they carried his most holy soul to the gathering place of the Patriarchs and Prophets, where he was immediately recognized by all as clothed in the splendors of incomparable grace, as the putative father and the intimate friend of the Redeemer, worthy of highest veneration. Conformable to the will and mandate of the Lord his arrival spread unutterable joy in this countless gathering of the saints by the announcement of their speedy rescue.

167. Not to be passed over in silence is the fact that the lengthy infirmities and sufferings which preceded the precious death of St. Joseph were not the sole cause and occasion of his passing away, for despite all of his infirmities he could have extended the term of his life if to them he had not joined the fire of the intense love within his bosom. So his death would be more the triumph of his love than of the effects of original sin, the Lord suspended the special and miraculous assistance by which his natural forces were enabled to withstand the violence of his love during his lifetime. As soon as this divine assistance was withdrawn nature was overcome by his love, and the bonds and chains by which this most holy soul was detained in its mortal

* cf. *Incarnation* 681 [Ed.]

body were at once dissolved, and the separation of the soul from the body in which death consists took place. Love, then, was the real cause of the death of St. Joseph as I have said above (155). This was at the same time the greatest and most glorious of all his infirmities, for in it death is but a sleep of the body and the beginning of real life.

168. The great Queen of heaven, seeing her spouse had passed away, began to prepare his body for burial according to Jewish custom. No other hands touched him than her own and those of the holy Angels, who assisted Her in visible human forms. So the utmost propriety could be observed by the Virgin Mother, God enveloped the body of St. Joseph in a wonderful light which hid all except his countenance, and thus his purest Spouse, though She clothed him for burial, saw only his face. Sweetest fragrance exhaled from his body, and it remained so beautiful and lifelike that the neighboring people eagerly came to see it and were filled with admiration. With the assistance of his relatives, acquaintances, and many others, especially the Redeemer of the world, his most blessed Mother, and a great multitude of Angels, the sacred body of the glorious St. Joseph was carried to the common burying place. Yet on all these occasions and in these occupations the most prudent Queen preserved her composure and gravity, without altering her countenance by trivial or unladylike expressions, nor did her sorrow prevent Her from attending to all that belonged to the service of her deceased spouse or her divine Son; in every one of her movements was visible the royal and magnanimous behavior of the Queen of the human race. She reiterated her grateful acknowledgment of the great favors granted to her spouse by the Son of God, and prostrate at his feet in new abasement of humility She said to Him: "Lord and Master of my whole being, my true Son and Teacher, the sanctity of my spouse Joseph could until now detain Thee so we could be worthy of thy desirable company; yet with the death of thy beloved servant I fear losing this good which I do not merit. I appeal, O Lord, to thy own goodness not to abandon me, accepting the humble desires and longings of the heart which loves Thee." The Savior of the world accepted this new offering of his most holy Mother, and He promised not to leave Her until the time when obedience to his eternal Father would oblige Him to begin his life of public preaching.

TEACHING OF MOST HOLY MARY, THE QUEEN OF HEAVEN.

169. My dearest daughter, it was not without special reason thy heart was moved to great compassion and pity toward those who are at the point of death, and inspired with a desire to help them in that hour; for it is true, as thou hast known, that then the souls of men suffer the most incredible and dangerous labors coming from the snares of the demon, from their own nature, and from visible creatures. That hour is the great trial of life, upon which depends the last sentence of eternal death or eternal life, of eternal suffering or eternal glory. Since the Most High has condescendingly vouchsafed to fill thee with these sentiments, I exhort thee to exert all thy powers and faculties to act accordingly. Remember then, my friend, that when Lucifer and his satellites of darkness perceive by the course of natural events that anyone falls prey to a dangerous and mortal disease, they immediately prepare to assail the poor and unwary soul with all their malice and astuteness in order to vanquish him if possible by various temptations; and when they perceive the end of the term allowed them to persecute such souls is at hand, they try to compensate for it by their fury, adding to their malice that which they lack in time.

170. At such times they gather like bloodthirsty wolves and search out the natural and acquired failings in his nature, taking into account his inclinations, habits and customs, and where his passions cause him greater weakness, in order to direct toward this part the strongest battery and

engines of war. Those who have a disorderly love of earthly life they persuade there is not such great danger, and they prevent others from undeceiving them. Those who have been negligent in the reception of the holy Sacraments they try to make still more careless, and they place obstacles and difficulties in the way so they might die without them, or receive them without fruit and with a bad disposition. Others they fill with false suggestions and shame so they might not confess their sins and open their conscience. Others they confuse and try to prevent from making proper restitution and thus unburdening their consciences. Others who love vanity they entangle, even at that last hour, in many vain and proud desires with regard to what is to be done for them after death. Those who have been avaricious or sensual they seek to excite violently toward what they loved so blindly during life. In short, this cruel enemy avails himself of all the bad habits and customs in order to fill their minds with images of creatures and draw them away from their salvation or make them incapable of it. All the sinful actions and vicious habits of his previous life have become as it were pledges in the hands of the common enemy for the possession of the sinner, and weapons for assault and battery in this tremendous hour of death. Every appetite indulged has opened a way or path by which he enters into the castle of the soul. Once in he breathes forth his pestilential fumes and raises the clouds of darkness, his proper work, so the soul may not give heed to the divine inspirations, have no true sorrow for his sins, and do no penance for his wicked life.

171. Generally these enemies cause great damage to souls in that hour by exciting the vain hope of a longer life and the ability to execute later on what God suggests to them by means of the holy angels. Giving way to this deceit they find themselves afterwards betrayed and lost. Just as great is the danger of those who have shown little esteem in life for the holy Sacraments; because of this contempt, which is very offensive to the Lord and the saints, divine justice is accustomed to punish it by leaving these souls in the hands of their wicked counsels, since they do not desire to take advantage of the opportune remedy in due time. Thus they are themselves forsaken by the Lord in their last hour, in which they expected to provide for their salvation. There are few among the just whom this ancient serpent does not furiously attack in their last agony; and if Satan expects to bring down many saints at such times, what hope have the wicked, the negligent, and the sinful, who have spent their whole lives making themselves unworthy of divine favor and grace, and who are devoid of meritorious works to offset the assaults of their enemies? My holy spouse Joseph was one of those who enjoyed the privilege of neither seeing nor feeling the presence of the demon in his last hour, for as soon as they approached to deal with him as they do with the rest of men they felt a powerful force which kept them at a distance, and the holy Angels hurled them back into the abyss. Seeing themselves thus oppressed and crushed they were seized with great uneasiness and confusion. Almost stupefied, Lucifer called a meeting of his followers in hell in order to consult about this surprising event, and to have them once more search the earth for the Messiah, and then happened what thou shalt relate later on in its place (222ff.).

172. Hence thou shalt understand the great danger of the hour of death, when both the good works and the bad shall begin to show their effects. I shall not tell thee how many are thus lost so thy sincere love of God might not cause thee to die of sorrow at this loss. But the general rule is: A good life gives hope of a good end; all other reliance is doubtful, and salvation resting upon it is very rare and contingent. The best precaution is to take a good start from afar, and therefore I admonish thee that at the dawning of each day, when thou lookest upon the light, thou seriously consider whether it may be the last day of thy life; and as if it shall indeed be thy last day, for thou dost not know, compose thy soul in such a state as to be able to meet death with a joyful

countenance if it comes. Do not delay even for one instant sorrow for thy sins and a firm purpose of confessing them as soon as thou findest thyself guilty of any, and of amending the least of thy imperfections. In all this be so careful as not to leave upon thy conscience the smallest defect without being sorry for it and without cleansing thyself by the blood of my most holy Son. Place thyself in such a condition that thou art ready to appear before the just Judge, who is to examine and judge thy least thoughts and all thy movements.

173. In order for thee to help according to thy pious desires those who are in danger of death, thou must give to others the same counsels that I have now given thee. Exhort them to lead a careful life in order to secure a happy death; moreover, say some prayers for this intention every day of thy life, fervently asking the Almighty to disperse the deceits of the demons, to destroy the snares prepared against those who are in the throes of death, and that his right hand confound all the demons. Know that I have directed my prayers to that end for mortals, and in this I desire thee to imitate me. In order to help them so much the more, I desire thee to order and command the demons to depart from the sick and stop their persecutions, and thou canst very efficaciously use this power even when thou art absent from the sick, since it is in the name of the Lord thou hast commanded and compelled them for his greater honor and glory.

174. When thy own religious are in danger of death do thou, without exciting them, instruct them in what they are to do. Admonish them and help them to receive the holy Sacraments, and see that they receive them frequently during life in preparation for a good end. Seek to encourage and console them, speaking to them of the things of God and his mysteries contained in the Holy Scriptures. Exhort them to awaken their good intentions and desires, and to prepare themselves to receive the light and graces of the Most High. Excite them to hope, strengthen them against temptations, and teach them how they are to resist and conquer them, seeking to discover them before they manifest themselves. The Almighty shall give thee an understanding of them so thou mayest apply the right medicine to each, for the infirmities of the soul are hard to diagnose and cure. All that I now tell thee thou must execute as a most beloved daughter in the service of the Lord, and I shall procure for thee certain great privileges for thyself and for those thou dost desire to aid in that terrible hour. Do not hold back thy charity in these works, for thou shalt not work by thy own strength alone but by the power which God desires to exercise in thee for his own glory.