

## CHAPTER XXI

*St. John The Baptist, having Received Great Favors from Most Holy Mary, is Commanded by the Holy Ghost to Go Forth to Preach; He First Sends to the Heavenly Lady a Cross He Had.*

231. In this second Part I began to relate some of the favors conferred on St. John by Mary most holy during her sojourn in Egypt (*Inc.* 676), and her solicitude for her cousin St. Elizabeth and St. John when Herod resolved to take away the lives of the Holy Innocents. I have also mentioned that the future Precursor of Christ, after the death of his mother, persevered in the solitude of the desert without leaving it until the time appointed by divine Wisdom, and that he lived there more the life of a Seraph than of a man. His conversation was with the holy Angels and with the Lord of all creation; this was his sole occupation, and never was he idle in the exercise of his love and the heroic virtues which he began in the womb of his mother. Not for one moment was grace in him unprofitable, nor did he fail in the least point of perfection possible. His senses, being altogether withdrawn from earthly things, did not in any way hinder him, for they did not serve him as windows through which death enters the soul cloaked in the images of the deceitful beauty of creatures. Since this most happy Saint was so fortunate as to be visited by the divine light before he saw the light of the created sun of this world, he overlooked all that is seen by the eyes of the flesh, and fixed his interior gaze\* immovably upon the being of God and his infinite perfections.

232. The divine favors received by St. John exceed all human intelligence, capacity and thought, and his sanctity and exalted merits we shall understand in the beatific vision and not before. Since it does not pertain to the object of this History to relate what I have seen of these mysteries, and what the holy doctors and other authors have written of the great prerogatives of the heavenly Precursor, I must confine myself to relating that which is obligatory for my intention of recording what refers to the heavenly Lady, by whose hand and intercession the solitary John received magnificent benefits. Not the least among them was her sending food to him every day until he reached the age of seven years, which She did by the ministry of the holy Angels as I mentioned above (*Ib.*). From his seventh year until he reached the ninth She sent him only bread, but after that year She ceased to send him any food, for She understood that during the rest of his stay in the desert it was the will of heaven and of himself that he nourish himself by roots, wild honey, and locusts (*Mt.* 3:4), which he accordingly did until he came forth to preach. Although the Queen did not any more send him food, yet She continued to send to him her holy Angels in order to console him and inform him of the doings and mysteries of the incarnate Word, but these visits happened no more frequently than once every eight days.

233. This great favor, besides serving other ends, encouraged St. John to bear with his solitude. Not that the desolation of his abode and the severity of his penance caused him any discouragement, for to make these desirable and sweet to him his own wonderful sanctity and grace were sufficient; rather, these favors were opportune so the most ardent love which he had for Christ our Lord and his most holy Mother would not be so troubled by the absence and privation of their conversation and sight which he desired as holy and grateful, for there is no doubt that restraining this desire was a far greater mortification and pain to his loving soul than all the inclemencies of his habitation, his fasting and penances, and the horrors of the lonely

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\* cf. Lk. 17:21 [Ed.]

mountains, and would have been impossible if his heavenly Lady had not assisted him by continually sending her holy Angels to bring messages from his Beloved. The great Hermit inquired into all the particulars of the Son and Mother with the loving anxieties of the spouse (Cant. 1:6). He sent to them the intimate affections and aspirations of his heart wounded by their love and their absence, and of the divine Princess he asked, by the hand of her ambassadors, that in his name She supplicate the Lord to send him his blessing and that She adore Him and render Him humble reverence. He himself ceased not to adore the Lord in spirit and in truth from his solitude. He also asked the holy Angels who visited him and the others who attended upon him to do the same. These were the ordinary occupations of the Precursor until he arrived at the perfect age of thirty years, and in this manner he was prepared by divine Providence for his appointed task.

234. The acceptable time destined by the eternal Wisdom had come in which the voice of the incarnate Word, this voice being John, was to be heard crying out in the wilderness as Isaias said (Is. 40:3). As related by the Evangelists (Mt. 3:3), in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, under the high priests Annas and Caiphaz, the command of God came to John, the son of Zacharias, in the desert (Lk. 3:1ff.); and he came to the banks of the Jordan, preaching the baptism of penance for the remission of sins and preparing hearts for the reception of the promised Messiah, pointing Him out with his finger, He who had been expected for so many ages. This word and command of the Lord St. John heard in an ecstasy in which, by a special operation of the Divinity, he was enlightened and prepared by the plenitude of the light and grace of the Holy Ghost. In this rapture he obtained a deep insight into the mysteries of the Redemption, and he was favored with an abstractive vision of the Divinity so wonderful that he was transformed and changed to a new existence of sanctity and grace. The Lord commanded him to issue forth from the desert in order to prepare the way for the preaching of the incarnate Word by his own, thus exercising the office of a Precursor and all that pertained to it, for he was now instructed and filled with most abundant grace for his work.

235. The new preacher St. John came from the desert clothed in camel skin and girded with a cincture or cord made likewise of skins. His feet were bare, his face thin and emaciated, his appearance most grave and wonderful, with incomparable modesty and humble seriousness; his soul was invincible and magnanimous, his heart inflamed with the love of God and man, and his words vivid, serious and burning, like lightning flashed forth from the powerful arm of God and his immutable and divine being. He was gentle toward the meek, loving toward the humble, terrifying for the proud, an admirable spectacle for angels and men, formidable for sinners, and an object of horror for the demons. He was a preacher fit to be the instrument of the incarnate Word and such as was needed for this people of the Hebrews, who were so hardhearted, ungrateful and stubborn, and who were now cursed with heathen governors, avaricious and proud priests, without enlightenment, without prophets, without piety, and without fear of God, though they had been visited by so many calamities and chastisements for their sins. He was now sent to open the eyes of this people to their miserable state and prepare their hearts to know and receive their Savior and Master.

236. The holy anchorite John had a large cross made many years before which he kept at his bedside; with it he performed some exercises of penance, and he was accustomed to place himself upon it in the form of one crucified when he was engaged in prayer. He did not wish to leave this treasure in the desert; hence, before issuing forth, he sent it by the hands of the holy Angels to the Queen of heaven and earth and requested them to tell Her that this cross had been his greatest and most beloved companion in his long banishment, and that he sent it to Her as a

rich jewel because he knew what was to be wrought upon a cross by the Son of God, and also because the holy Angels had told him that her most holy Son and Redeemer of the world often made use of a cross like this when performing his prayers in his oratory. The Angels had made this cross, fashioning it from a tree in the desert at his request, for the Saint had neither the necessary strength nor the instruments for this kind of work, whereas the holy Angels lacked not the skill and needed no instruments due to the power they have over material creation. With this present and message of St. John the holy princes returned to their Queen and Lady, and She received it with sweetest sorrow and bittersweetness in the depths of her most chaste Heart, conferring within Herself regarding the mysteries which in so short a time would be enacted upon the most hard wood of the cross. She addressed it in words of tenderness and placed it in her oratory where She kept it ever afterwards together with the other cross which had been used by her Son in his exercises. At her death the most prudent Lady left these crosses, with other remembrances, to the Apostles as a priceless heritage, and by them they were carried through different countries where they preached.

237. In regard to this matter I had some doubts which I proposed to the Mother of Wisdom, saying to Her: “Queen of heaven and my Lady, most holy among the saints and chosen among all creatures as the Mother of God himself, what I have here written presents to me a difficulty as an ignorant and slow woman; with thy permission I wish to propose it to Thee, O Lady, who art the Mistress of wisdom and through thy condescension hast desired to be my Teacher, illuminating my darkness and instructing me in the salutary doctrine of eternal life. My difficulty is having understood that not only St. John but also Thee, my Queen, held in reverence the cross before thy most holy Son had died upon it; I have always believed that until the hour in which He wrought our Redemption upon the sacred wood it was a gibbet for the punishment of criminals, and for this reason the cross was considered ignominious and contemptible. Also the holy Church teaches us that all its value and dignity came to the Holy Cross by its contact with our Redeemer and through the mystery of the Redemption of man.”

*ANSWER AND INSTRUCTION OF THE QUEEN  
OF HEAVEN, MOST HOLY MARY.*

238. My daughter, gladly shall I satisfy thy desire and answer thy doubt. What thou sayest is true: The cross was ignominious (Dt. 21:23) before my Son and Lord honored and sanctified it by his Passion and Death, and solely because of this Passion and Death the adoration and reverence shown to it by the Church is now due to it. If anyone who was ignorant of the mysteries which were connected with it, and which were so well known to me and to St. John, would have given it such worship and honor as I have before the Redemption, he would have been guilty of error and idolatry, for he would have worshipped a creature not knowing that it was worthy of such honor. But we showed this veneration to the cross for several reasons. We knew for certain the Redeemer was to accomplish his work upon the cross, and we also knew that before dying upon it He had begun to sanctify this sacred emblem by his contact in placing Himself upon it during his prayers and in offering Himself freely to die upon it; moreover, the eternal Father had accepted these foreseen works of the cross from his divine Son by an unalterable decree. All the actions and contacts of the incarnate Word were of infinite value and thus sanctified the sacred wood, making it worthy of the highest veneration. Whenever I or St. John showed this reverence to the cross we had before our minds these mysteries and truths. We did not adore the cross in itself, nor the material of which it was made, for the divine worship

was not due to it until the works of the Redemption had been completed upon it; yet we paid attention to it and respected it as the formal representation of what the incarnate Word would accomplish upon it. This was the real object of the reverence and adoration we gave to the cross, as it also is now in the adoration given to it in the holy Church.

239. Accordingly thou must ponder well thy obligation and that of all mortals in regard to the reverence and esteem due to the Holy Cross, for if I and his Precursor, even before the death of my most holy Son upon it, so eagerly imitated Him in his love and reverence of it, and in the exercises which He performed in connection therewith, what must the faithful children of the Church do after they have seen their Creator and Redeemer crucified upon it, and when they have the image of the Crucified before their very eyes? Hence I desire thee, my daughter, to embrace the cross with boundless esteem, use it as the priceless jewel of thy Spouse, and accustom thyself to perform those exercises upon it which are known and practiced by thee, without ever of thy own will forgetting or neglecting them as long as obedience shall permit thee. Whenever thou dost approach such sacred exercises let it be with a profound reverence and consideration of the Passion and Death of the Lord thy Beloved. Strive to introduce this same custom among thy religious, zealously exhorting them thereto, for no exercise is more proper to the spouses of Christ, and if performed with devotion and reverence it shall be most pleasing to their Lord. In addition to this I desire thee, in imitation of St. John the Baptist, to prepare thy heart for all the Holy Ghost desires to work in thee for his own glory and for the benefit of souls. As far as depends upon thee love solitude and withdraw thy faculties from the confusion of created things. Whenever thy duty to God forces thee to deal with creatures, seek always thy own sanctification and the edification of thy neighbor, so in thy conversation the zeal and the spirit which lives in thy heart may shine forth. The exalted virtues of St. John now known to thee, and those resplendent in the lives of other Saints, should serve thee as a stimulus and example. Seek like a busy bee to build up the sweet honeycomb of sanctity and innocence so much desired in thee by my divine Son. Distinguish well between the labors of the bee and of the spider: The one converts her nourishment into sweetness and usefulness for the living and the dead, while the other changes it into snare and venom. Do thou gather the flowers of virtue from the Saints in the garden of the holy Church insofar as thy weak strength, aided by grace, can imitate them, and diligently and eloquently endeavor to benefit the living and the dead, while fleeing from the poison of damaging guilt in all things.