

CHAPTER XXVI

After His Fast the Lord allows Himself to be Tempted by Lucifer; His Majesty Vanquishes Him, and His Most Holy Mother Takes Notice of All that Happens.

284. In chapter XX of this Book (number 226) I have related how Lucifer came forth from the infernal caverns in order to find and tempt the divine Master. I mentioned also that the Lord concealed Himself in the desert, where after fasting almost forty days He permitted the tempter to approach Him, as it says in the Gospel (Mt. 4:2). Lucifer came to the desert, and seeing the object of his search alone he was highly rejoiced, for he found Him separated from his most holy Mother, whom he and his satellites of darkness esteemed as their enemy due to the defeats they had suffered at her hands. Since he had never entered into any contest with our Savior, and since his most holy Mother was absent, the dragon in his pride esteemed his victory secure. But when Lucifer and the other demons came close to the combatant to examine Him, they began to feel great fear and discouragement, not because they recognized Him as true God, for of this they had no suspicions as long as they saw Him so despised, nor because of any previous experience with Him, for as yet they had measured their forces only with the heavenly Queen, but because they saw manifested in his exterior so much reserve and so much majesty, and because his actions were so perfect and heroic that they inspired great fear and dread. His behavior and his condition were totally different from those of other men, whom they had tempted and easily overcome. Lucifer conferred about these matters with his demons, saying: "What man is this, who is so severe toward the vices by which we assail other men? If He is so forgetful of the world, and has his flesh in such entire subjection and control, how shall we find any opening for our temptations? How shall we hope for victory if He has deprived us of the weapons by which we make warfare among men? I have many misgivings about this contest." So great is the value and power of contempt of the world and subjection of the flesh that they give terror to the demon and all hell, and they would not rise up against us in such pride if they would not find men subject to these unhappy tyrants before they come to tempt them.

285. Christ the Savior permitted Lucifer to remain under the false impression that He was a mere man, though very holy and just. He desired to raise the courage and malice of Lucifer for the contest, for such is the effect of any advantages discerned by the demon in his attacks upon the victims of his temptations. Rousing his courage by his own arrogance, the dragon began this battle in the wilderness with greater prowess and fierceness than the demons ever exhibited in their battles with men. Lucifer and his satellites strained all their power and malice, lashing themselves into fury against the superior strength which they soon found in Christ our Lord. Yet our Savior tempered all his actions with divine wisdom and goodness, and in justice and equity concealed the secret source of his infinite power, exhibiting just enough as would suffice to prove Him to be a man so far advanced in holiness as to be able to gain these victories against the infernal foes. In order to begin the battle as man, He directed a prayer to the eternal Father from his inmost soul, into which the intelligence of the demon could not penetrate, saying: "My Father and eternal God, I now enter into battle with the enemy in order to crush his power and humble his pride and malice against my beloved souls. For thy glory and for the benefit of souls I submit to the daring presumption of Lucifer. I desire thereby to crush his head, so when mortals are attacked by his temptations without their fault they may find his arrogance already broken. I beseech Thee, my Father, to remember my battle and victory in favor of mortals assailed by the common enemy. Strengthen their weakness through my triumph, let them obtain victory; let

them be encouraged by my example, and let them learn from Me how to resist and overcome their enemies.”

286. During this battle the holy Angels who attended upon Christ were hidden from the sight of Lucifer so he would not begin to understand and suspect the divine power of our Savior. The holy Angels gave glory and praise to the Father and the Holy Ghost, who were pleased with the admirable works of the incarnate Word. From her oratory the most blessed Lady Mary also witnessed the battle in the manner to be described below. The temptation of Christ began on the thirty-fifth day of his fast in the desert, and lasted to the end of the fast as the Gospel says. Lucifer assumed the shape of a man and presented himself before the Lord as a stranger who had never seen or known Him before. He clothed himself in refulgent light, like that of an angel, and conjecturing that the Lord after his long fast must be suffering great hunger, he said to Him: *If Thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread* (Mt. 4:3). By thus cunningly resting his advice on the supposition of his being the Son of God, the demon sought some information on what was giving him the greatest concern. But the Savior of the world answered only in these few words: *Not in bread alone doth man live, but in every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God* (Ib. 4). Christ took the words from the eighth chapter of Deuteronomy (v. 3). But the demon did not penetrate into the meaning given to these words by Christ, for Lucifer understood Him to mean that God could sustain the life of man without bread or any other nourishment. But though this was also the true signification of these words, yet our divine Master included a much deeper meaning, desiring by these words to say to him: This Man, with whom thou speakest, lives in the word of God, which is the divine Word, hypostatically united to his humanity. Though that was precisely what Lucifer desired so much to know, he did not deserve to understand the words of the Godman because he did not wish to adore Him as true God.

287. Lucifer found himself repulsed by the force of this answer and by the hidden power which accompanied it, but he wished to show no weakness nor desist from the contest. The Lord allowed the demon to continue in his temptation, and for this purpose permitted Himself to be carried by Lucifer bodily to Jerusalem and placed on the pinnacle of the temple. Here the Lord could see multitudes of people, though He himself was not seen by anyone. Lucifer tried to arouse in the Lord the vain desire of casting Himself down from this high place so the crowds of men, seeing Him unhurt, might proclaim Him as a great and wonderful man of God. Again using the words of Holy Scriptures, he said to Him (Mt. 4:6): *If Thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down, for it is written that He hath given his angels charge over Thee, and in their hands they shall bear Thee up, lest perhaps Thou dash thy foot against a stone* (Ps. 90:11-12). The supernal spirits who accompanied their King were full of wonder that He permitted Lucifer to carry Him bodily in his hands solely for the benefit of mortal man. With the prince of darkness were gathered innumerable demons, for on that occasion hell was almost emptied of its inhabitants in order to furnish assistance for this enterprise. The Author of wisdom answered (Mt. 4:7): *It is written again: Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God* (Dt. 6:16). While giving these answers the Redeemer of the world exhibited incomparable meekness, most profound humility, and such superiority to the demon in majesty and firmness, that by this grandeur, and by seeing Him in no way disturbed, the untamed pride of Lucifer was troubled even more, and he experienced new torment and confusion.

288. Being thus foiled, he attacked our Lord in still another way, seeking to rouse his ambition by offering Him some share in his dominion. For this purpose he carried the Lord up to a high mountain from which could be seen many lands, and said to Him with perfidious daring: *All*

these will I give Thee, if falling down Thou wilt adore me (Mt. 4:9). Exorbitant boldness and more than insane madness and perfidy! Offering to the Lord what he did not possess, nor ever could give, since the earth, the stars, the kingdoms, principalities, riches and treasures, all belong to the Lord, and He alone can give or withhold them when it serves and pleases Him! Never can Lucifer give anything, not even of the things of the earth, and therefore all his promises are false. The King and Lord answered with imperial majesty (Ib. 10): *Begone, Satan; for it is written: The Lord thy God shalt thou adore, and Him only shalt thou serve* (Dt. 6:13). By this command, *begone Satan*, Christ our Redeemer took away from Lucifer permission to further tempt Him, and hurled him and all his legions into the deepest abysses of hell. There they found themselves entirely crushed and buried in its deepest caverns, unable to move for three days. When they were permitted again to rise, seeing themselves thus vanquished and annihilated, they began to suspect that He who had terrified and conquered them had thus given indications that He was the Son of God made man. In this doubt and uncertainty they remained, without ever being able to come to a certain conviction until the death of the Savior. Lucifer was overcome by hellish wrath at his defeat and was almost consumed in his fury.

289. Our divine Conqueror Christ then sang hymns of praise and gratitude to the eternal Father for having given Him this triumph over the common enemy of God and man, and amid the triumphal songs of a multitude of Angels He was carried back to the desert. They carried Him in their hands, though He did not need their help since He could make use of his own divine power; but this service of the Angels was due to Him in recompense for enduring the audacity of Lucifer in carrying to the pinnacle of the temple and to the mountain top the sacred humanity of Christ, in which dwelt substantially and truly the Divinity itself. It could never have entered into the thoughts of man that the Lord would give such permission to Satan if it had not been made known to us in the Gospel. But I do not know which deserves the greater astonishment: That He consented to be carried about from one place to another by Lucifer, who did not know Him, or that He allowed Himself to be sold by Judas, or to be received in the Blessed Sacrament by this treacherous disciple and by so many sinful members of the Church who do know Him to be their God and yet receive Him unworthily. What certainly must cause us wonder is that He permitted as well the one as the other, and that He continues to permit it for our benefit and in order to draw us to Him by his meekness and patient love. O sweetest Master of my soul! How sweet, kind and merciful art Thou toward souls (Joel 2:13)! Out of purest love Thou didst descend from heaven to earth for them; Thou didst suffer and give away thy life for their salvation. Mercifully Thou dost wait for them and bear with them; Thou dost call and seek after them; Thou dost receive them and enter into their bosom; Thou dost yield Thyself entirely to them and dost desire them to for Thee. What pierces my soul and breaks my heart is that while Thou dost seek to draw us to Thee out of pure love, we flee from Thee and respond to all Thy excesses of love only by ingratitude. O immense love of my God, so badly repaid and so little acknowledged! Give, O Lord, tears to my eyes* to weep over this wrong which is so deeply to be deplored, and let all the just of the earth help me. When the Lord had been carried back to the desert the Angels, according to the Gospel, ministered unto Him (Mt. 4:11), for at the end of his temptation and fast they served Him with celestial food so his sacred body would again be invigorated. Not only were the Angels present to rejoice at this divine banquet, but also the birds of the desert came in order to contribute to the recreation of their Creator by their harmonious songs and graceful movements, and in their own way the wild animals of the desert joined them, throwing off their

* cf. Jer. 9:1 [Ed.]

native wildness and producing their joyful antics and sounds in acknowledgment of the victory of their Lord.

290. Let us return to Nazareth where in her oratory the Princess of the Angels had witnessed the battles of her most holy Son. She had seen them all by the divine light already described and by the uninterrupted messages of her Angels, who brought them back and forth between the Savior and Herself. She repeated the same prayers at the same time as the Lord. She entered likewise into the conflict with the dragon, although invisibly and spiritually. From her retreat She anathematized and crushed Lucifer and his followers, cooperating in all the doings of Christ in our favor. When She perceived the demon carried the Lord from place to place She wept bitterly, because the malice of sin obliged the King of kings and Lord of lords to such permission and condescension. For all the victories which He gained over the demon She composed new canticles and praises to the Divinity and the most holy humanity of Christ, while the Angels set them to music and were sent with them to congratulate Him for the blessings won for the human race. Christ on his part sent back the Angels with words of sweet consolation and rejoicing because of his triumphs over Lucifer.

291. And since She had been his faithful companion and sharer in his labors and fast, the Lord sent Her some of the celestial food and commanded the Angels to present and administer it to Her. Wonderful to record, the great multitudes of birds which had gathered around the Savior flew after these Angels with a heavier yet exceedingly swift flight, and entered the dwelling of the great Queen and Lady of heaven and earth, and while She partook of the food sent to Her by her Son they sang and chirped before Her in the same way as they had done in the presence of the Savior. The divine Lady tasted the heavenly food, now even more precious to Her since it came from and was blessed by the hands of her Son, and by it She was again rejoiced and strengthened after her long and rigorous fast. She gave thanks to the Almighty and humiliated Herself to the very earth, and the acts of her virtue were so heroic and excellent that our words and conceptions are not able to encompass them. We shall see them in their true light when we shall rejoice with the Lord; then we shall give glory and praise for these ineffable blessings, as is due to Him from the entire human race.

A QUESTION WHICH I ASKED THE QUEEN OF HEAVEN, MARY MOST HOLY.

292. Queen of all the heavens and Mistress of the universe, thy kind condescension emboldens me to ask Thee, as my Teacher and Mother, for information concerning a certain doubt raised in my mind by the mention of the celestial food which the Angels served to the Savior in the desert (*Inc.* 634, 706). I understood it to be of the same quality as that served to Thee and to the Lord on other occasions when ordinary food was lacking. I have called it celestial food because I have no other name for it, yet I do not know if that name is appropriate, for I am uncertain whence this food was procured and what its nature was. I understand in heaven there is no need of bodily food, for there the earthly mode of sustaining life is not continued. Although the Blessed enjoy also sensible delight from created objects, and also the taste must have its proper function in heaven just as the other senses, I suspect its pleasures are not derived from the eating of food but from some overflow of the glory of the soul into the body and its senses. Thus the grossness and imperfection of the senses in mortal life have no share in their heavenly activity and in its objects. Of all this I, being so ignorant, desire to be informed by thy kind and maternal condescension.

ANSWER AND TEACHING OF THE HEAVENLY LADY.

293. My daughter, thou hast well doubted, for it is true that in heaven no material food or nourishment is used, as thou hast already understood and declared. The food which the Angels brought to my holy Son and to me was truly a heavenly food, and I myself have suggested this name to thee, because the strength of this food is heavenly and not earthly, where everything is gross, very material and limited. It will help thee to understand something of the quality of this food and the manner of its creation when I tell thee the Lord, to supply our needs, made use of some created material, most ordinarily water due to its clearness and simple composition, for He does not require complicated matter for his miracles. At other times it was bread and some fruit. These materials He furnished with such power and such qualities of taste that they exceeded, as heaven does the earth, all the delicacies here below. There is nothing in the world which can be compared to them, for all other food is insipid and without strength in comparison to this celestial food. To understand this better, consider the examples mentioned in Holy Scripture, for instance the food given to Elias (III Kg. 19:6), by the strength of which he walked for forty days and forty nights to mount Horeb; and the manna, which was called the bread of the angels (Ps. 77:25) because they prepared it by condensing the vapors of the earth (Ex. 16:14), and thus condensed and shaped like grain (Num. 11:7) they showered it upon the earth. It possessed a great variety of tastes, as Scripture tells us (Wis. 16:20-1), and it was very nourishing to the body. A third example is the miracle worked by my most holy Son at the nuptials of Cana, changing the water into wine, giving it such an excellent flavor and strength that it excited the admiration of the guests who tasted it (Jn. 2:10).

294. In the same way as the Lord gave a supernatural excellence to the water and turned it into a most sweet and delicate liquor, so He also gave a spiritual strength to the bread or the fruit. Such nourishment restored the waste of bodily strength and delighted the senses in an admirable manner, renewing their vigor and fitting them for labors and difficulties without causing the least loathing or inconvenience. This kind of food was administered by the holy Angels to my most holy Son after his fast, and this my spouse Joseph and I received on different occasions. The Almighty has shown the same favor also to some of his friends and servants, rejoicing them with heavenly food, though not so frequently and in such miraculous circumstances as He did with us. Thy doubt is then answered; now listen to the instruction pertaining to this chapter.

295. In order to understand better what thou hast written, thou must keep in mind three motives of our Lord, among others, in entering upon this battle with Lucifer and his infernal ministers, and this understanding will furnish thee great light and strength against them. His first motive was to destroy sin and the seeds of sin, sown in human nature by this enemy in the first transgression of Adam. These seeds are the seven capital vices of pride, avarice, lust, and the others, being the seven heads of the dragon. Lucifer appointed an infernal chieftain over each one of these vices in the battle of hell against the human race, and the evil spirits were distributed into squadrons under these leaders in order to maintain the sort of orderly confusion of which thou didst speak in the first Part of this divine History (*Con.* 103). Accordingly my divine Son entered into conflict with each one of these princes of darkness, vanquishing them and destroying their power. In the Gospels only three temptations are mentioned, being those which are more manifest to the senses; however, the conflict and subsequent triumph was far more extensive, for Christ our Lord overcame all these princes and their vices. Pride He overcame by his humility, anger by his meekness, avarice by his contempt of riches, and all the other vices by their corresponding virtues. The greatest defeat and consternation, however, overtook these

enemies at the foot of the Cross, when they became certain it was the incarnate Word who had thus conquered and crushed them. Since that time they are timid in entering into conflict with those men who rely on the power and triumph of my Son (708, 712).

296. The second motive for engaging in this conflict was obedience to the command of the eternal Father, who not only desired Him to die for men and redeem them by his Passion and Death, but also to enter into battle with the demons and vanquish them by the force of his incomparable virtues. The third motive, and the one which was consequent upon the second, was to furnish mankind an example and a model for triumphing over their enemies, and to take away from all men any cause of wonder or surprise at being tempted and persecuted by them. He desired all to have this consolation in their temptations and conflicts, that their Redeemer and Teacher first suffered them in his own Person (Heb. 4:15); for though in some respects his temptations were different from ours, yet in substance they were entirely the same, only of greater force and malice of Satan. Christ my Lord permitted Lucifer to strain the fury of his forces against His Majesty, so by his divine power He would crush and enfeeble hell in its battles against men, making it more easy for men to overcome them if they wish to avail themselves of this benefit thus given them by their Redeemer.

297. All mortals have need of this instruction if they are to vanquish the demon; but thou, my daughter, dost need it more than many generations because of the wrath of this dragon against thee, and due to thy natural weakness in battle when not assisted by my teaching and this example. Above all be careful to keep in subjection thy flesh and the influences of the world, mortifying thy flesh and fleeing the world by retiring from creatures to the interior of thy soul, thus conquering both these enemies and preserving the blessed light of grace which thou there receivest, and loving nothing except insofar as well-ordered charity permits. For this purpose renew in thyself the memory of the narrow path* pointed out to thee, for the Lord has given thee a natural faculty of ardent love, and we desire thee to consecrate this faculty entirely to the love of God. Consent not to any movement of thy appetites, no matter in how small a matter, and allow thy senses no liberty except for the exaltation of the Most High or for suffering or doing something for the benefit and love of thy neighbor. If thou obey me in all things I shall ensure thou art protected and strengthened against this cruel dragon for the battles of the Lord (I Kg. 25:28). A thousand shields shall surround thee (Cant. 4:4), both for defense and offense against the demon. Accustom thyself always to use against him the words of Holy Scriptures, not deigning to exchange many words with such an astute enemy. Weak creatures must not indulge in conferences or arguments with their mortal enemy and the master of lies, since even my divine Son, who is powerful and infinitely wise, did not do so. In this He gave souls an example how circumspectly they are to act with the demon. Arm thyself with living faith, unwavering hope, and love of humility, for these are the virtues by which the dragon is crushed and vanquished, and against which he dares not make a stand; he flees from them because they are powerful weapons against his pride and arrogance.

* cf. Mt. 7:13-14; Lk. 13:24 [Ed.]