

CHAPTER XXV

Our Redeemer after His Baptism Walks to the Desert, Where by the Practice of Heroic Virtues He Gains Great Victories over our Vices; His Most Holy Mother Takes Notice of All His Doings and Imitates Him with All Perfection.

274. By the testimony which the highest Truth had vouchsafed to give of the divinity of Christ our Savior and Master (268), his Person and his teachings were so fully accredited before men that He could have immediately begun his public life and his divine activity and miracles so all could recognize Him as the natural Son of the eternal Father, as the Messiah of the Jews and the Savior of men. Nevertheless the divine Teacher of sanctity did not desire to begin his preaching nor be known as our Redeemer without first having triumphed over our enemies the world, the flesh, and the demon, so afterwards He could so much the more easily overcome the hellish deceits continually spread about by the demons. By his works and heroic virtues He desired to give us the first lessons of a Christian and spiritual life, and teach us by these triumphs of Christian perfection how we are to strengthen our weakness and discourage our common enemies by continued battle and victories, lest we be otherwise delivered over to them by the fluctuations of our own will. Although His Majesty, being God, was infinitely superior to the demon, and as man without guile or sin (I Peter 2:22), but rather of supreme sanctity and lordship over all creatures, He nevertheless desired as a holy and just man to conquer the vices and their author, offering his most holy humanity to the conflict of temptation, concealing for this his superiority from his invisible enemies.

275. By his retirement Christ our Lord began to conquer the world, and taught us how to conquer it, for it is an established fact that the world is accustomed to forsake those whom it does not need for its earthly purposes, and does not seek those who themselves do not seek it. Therefore he who really despises the world must show his contempt by ceasing to have any connection with it in his affections and aspirations. The Lord vanquished also the flesh, teaching us to overcome it by imposing upon his most innocent body such a severe and prolonged fast, though his body showed no rebellion against the good nor any inclinations to evil. The devil He vanquished by the preaching of the truth, as I shall subsequently relate, for all the temptations of the father of lies are accustomed to come cloaked and veiled in deceitful snares. That our Redeemer went forth to preach and make Himself known to the world not before but after these triumphs He attained is another lesson and warning against the danger which our fragility runs in accepting the honors of the world, even those consequent upon favors received from heaven, as long as our passions are not conquered and we have not vanquished our common enemies; for if the applause of men finds us unmortified and still living under the influence of the enemies within our own selves, the favors and blessings of the Lord offer us little security, and the wind of vainglory may overturn even the towering mountains of virtues. It is important for all men to remember that we carry the treasures of heaven in most fragile vases (II Cor. 4:7), and if God desires to glorify his Name by our weakness He will know by what means He shall draw his doings to light; for us modesty* alone is incumbent and our responsibility.

276. Without delay Christ our Lord pursued his journey from the Jordan to the desert after his Baptism. Only his holy Angels attended and accompanied Him, serving and worshipping Him,

* cf. Philip. 4:5; Epistle, Advent III [Ed.]

singing the divine praises for what He was now about to undertake for the remedy of human nature. He came to the place chosen by Him for his fast, a deserted spot among the cliffs and dry crags, where there was also a cavern much concealed. Here He halted, choosing it for his habitation during the days of his fast (Mt. 4:1). In deepest humility He prostrated Himself upon the ground, which was always the prelude of his prayer and that of his Blessed Mother. He praised the eternal Father and gave Him thanks for the works of his divine right hand and for having according to his pleasure provided this retirement for Him. In a suitable manner He thanked even this desert for accepting his presence and keeping Him hidden from the world during the time He was to spend there. He continued his prayers prostrate in the form of a cross, and this was his most frequent occupation in the desert, for in this manner He often prayed to the eternal Father for human salvation. During these prayers, for reasons which I shall explain when I come to the prayer in the garden, He sometimes sweat blood.

277. Many of the wild beasts of the desert came to the neighborhood now inhabited by their Creator, for He sometimes walked about in these regions. With an admirable instinct they recognized Him, and as if in testimony of this they gave forth their voices and made various movements. But the birds of heaven, of which great multitudes gathered around the Savior, were especially eager in their demonstrations, manifesting their joy at the blessed presence of their divine King and Lord by their sweet and loud singing and in diverse other ways. After the Savior had begun his fast He persevered therein without eating anything for forty days, offering up his fast to the eternal Father as a satisfaction for the disorders and sins to which men are drawn by the so vile and debasing, yet so common and even so much esteemed vice of gluttony. Just as our Lord overcame this vice so He also vanquished all the rest, and He made recompense to the eternal Judge and supreme Legislator for the injuries perpetrated through these vices by men. According to the enlightenment vouchsafed to me, our Savior, in order to assume the office of Preacher and Teacher, and to become our Mediator and Redeemer before the Father, thus vanquished all the vices of mortals, and He satisfied for the offenses committed through them by the exercise of the virtues contrary to them, just as He did in regard to gluttony. Although He continued this exercise during all his life with the most ardent charity, yet during his fast He directed in a special manner all his efforts toward this purpose.

278. A loving father whose sons have committed great crimes, for which they are to endure the most horrible punishment, sacrifices all his possessions in order to ward off their impending fate; likewise our most loving Father and Brother, Jesus Christ, desired to pay our debts. In satisfaction for our pride He offered his profound humility; for our avarice, his voluntary poverty and total privation of all that was his; for our base and lustful inclinations, his penance and austerity; for our hastiness and vengeful anger, his meekness and charity toward his enemies; for our negligence and laziness, his ceaseless labors; for our deceitfulness and envy, his candid and upright sincerity and truthfulness, and the sweetness of his loving conversation. In this manner He was placating the just Judge and soliciting pardon for the disobedient and illegitimate ones; and He not only obtained this pardon, but He merited for us new graces and favors so we could make ourselves worthy of his company and of the vision of his Father, and be his own inheritance for all eternity. Though He could have obtained all this for us by the most insignificant of his works, yet He acted not like we do; He demonstrated his love so abundantly that our ingratitude and hardness of heart shall have no excuse.

279. In order to keep informed of the doings of our Savior his most blessed Mother needed no other assistance than her continual visions and revelations; but in addition to all these She made use of the service of her holy Angels whom She sent to her divine Son. And this was arranged by

the Lord himself, so by means of such faithful messengers both He and She would rejoice in the sentiments and thoughts of their inmost Hearts faithfully related by these celestial messengers, and thus each heard the very same words as uttered by the other, though both Son and Mother already knew them in another way. As soon as the great Lady understood our Redeemer was on his way to the desert to fulfill his intention, She locked the doors of her dwelling without letting anyone know of her presence, and her retirement during the time of the fast of our Lord was so complete that her neighbors thought She had left with her divine Son. She entered into her oratory and remained there for forty days and nights without ever leaving it and without eating anything, just as She knew was done by her most holy Son. Both of them observed the same course of rigorous fasting. In all his prayers and exercises, his prostrations and genuflections, She followed our Savior, not omitting any of them; moreover, She performed them at the same time, for leaving aside all other occupations She thus profited by the information obtained from the Angels and by that other knowledge which I have already described. Whether He was present or not She knew the interior operations of the soul of Christ (*Inc.* 481, 534, etc.). All his bodily movements which She had been accustomed to perceive with her own senses She now knew by intellectual vision or through her holy Angels.

280. While the Savior was in the desert He made every day three hundred genuflections, which also was done by our Queen Mary in her oratory. The other portions of her time She spent in composing hymns with the Angels, as I have said in the last chapter. Thus imitating Christ the Lord the holy Queen cooperated with Him in all his prayers and petitions, gaining the same victories over the vices, and on her part proportionately satisfying for them by her virtues and exertions. Thus it happened that while Christ as our Redeemer gained for us so many blessings and abundantly paid all our debts, most holy Mary as his Coadjutrix and our Mother interposed her merciful intercession with Him, and became our Mediatrix to the fullest extent possible to a mere creature.

INSTRUCTION GIVEN ME BY THE QUEEN HERSELF, OUR LADY.

281. My daughter, corporal penances are so appropriate and legitimate for the mortal creature that the ignorance of this truth and debt, and the forgetfulness of and contempt for the obligation to embrace the cross,^{*} causes many souls to be damned and others to run the danger of it. The first reason why men should afflict their body and mortify their flesh is their having been conceived in sin (Ps. 50:7), for by original sin human nature is depraved, its passions rebel against reason, and its inclinations are evil and opposed to the spirit (Rom. 7:23). If the soul allows itself to be carried away by them it will be precipitated by the first vice into many others.[†] But if this beastly flesh is curbed by mortification and penance, it loses its strength and acknowledges the superiority of reason and the light of truth. The second reason is that no mortal has altogether avoided sinning against God, and the punishment and retribution must inevitably correspond to the guilt, either in this life or the next; thus since the soul commits sin in union with the body it follows that both of them must be punished. Interior sorrow alone is not sufficient for atonement if the flesh seeks to evade the punishment corresponding to the guilt; moreover, the debt is so great, and the satisfaction that can be given by the creature so limited

* cf. Mt. 10:38, 16:24; Lk. 9:23, 14:27 [Ed.]

† cf. Ps. 41:8 [Ed.]

and scanty, that there remains continual uncertainty whether the Judge is satisfied even after the exertions of a whole lifetime. Hence the soul must find no rest to the end of life.

282. Even though divine clemency is so liberal with men that if they try to satisfy for their sins by penance as far as their limited capacity goes God remits their offenses, and in addition thereto has promised the guilty ones new gifts, graces, and eternal rewards, yet his faithful and prudent servants who really love their Lord are constrained voluntarily to add other penances, for the debtor who merely desires to meet his obligation yet adds nothing of his own free will certainly pays his debts, but shall remain poor and destitute if after payment of his debts nothing remains. What then are those to expect who neither pay nor make any efforts towards paying? The third reason for bodily mortification, and the most urgent one, is the duty of Christians to imitate their divine Teacher and Master. My divine Son and I, without being guilty of any faults or bad inclinations, devoted ourselves to labors and made our lives a continual practice of penance and mortification of the flesh. It was thus the Lord saw fit to attain the glory of his body and of his holy Name (Lk. 24:26), and He desired me to follow Him in all things. If we then pursued such a course of life because it was reasonable, what must be thought of mortals who seek nothing but sweetness and delight, and abhor all penances, affronts, ignominies, fasting and mortification? Shall then only Christ our Lord and I suffer all these hardships, while the guilt-laden debtors and those deserving of all these punishments throw themselves carelessly into the foul inclinations of the flesh? Shall they employ their faculties, given to them for the service of Christ my Lord and for his following, merely in dancing attendance on their lusts and the devil, who has introduced evil into the world? This absurd position, maintained by the children of Adam, is the cause of great indignation in the just Judge.

283. It is true, my daughter, that by the bodily afflictions and mortifications of my most blessed Son the defects and deficiencies of human merits have been atoned for, and that He desired me, as a mere creature and as one taking the place of other creatures, to cooperate with Him most perfectly and exactly in all his penances and exercises. But this was not in order to exempt men from the practice of penance but rather to encourage them to it, for in order only to satisfy for their sins it was not necessary to suffer so much. My most holy Son, as a true Father and Brother, desired also to enhance the labors and penances of those who were to follow in his footsteps, for the efforts of creatures are of little value in the eyes of God unless they are made precious by the merits of Christ. If this is true of works which are entirely virtuous and perfect, how much more is it true of those which are infected with so many faults and deficiencies, even in the greatest acts of virtue as ordinarily performed by the children of Adam? For in the works of even the most spiritual and virtuous persons many deficiencies occur. These deficiencies are made good by the merits of Christ our Lord so the works of men may become acceptable to the eternal Father. But those who neglect good works and remain altogether idle can by no means expect to apply to themselves the good works of Christ, for they have in themselves nothing that can be perfected by them, but only such things as deserve condemnation. I do not now speak, my daughter, of the damnable error of some of the faithful who have introduced into the works of penance the sensuality and vanity of the world, so they merit greater punishment for their penance than for their sins, since they foster in their penances vain and imperfect purposes and forget the supernatural ends of penance, which alone give value to penance and life to the soul. On some other occasion, if necessary, I shall speak of this error. Do thou now deplore this blindness and labor with great zeal, for if thy labors were even as great as that of the Apostles,

Martyrs and Confessors, they would be no greater than they should be. Chastise thy body* with ever greater severity, and remember thou art deficient in many things, while thou hast but a short life and art so weak and incapable of repaying thy debts.

* cf. I Cor. 9:27 [Ed.]