

CHAPTER XII

The Persecution of the Church After the Death of St. Stephen; the Labors of our Queen During It; and how by Her Solitude the Apostles Ordained the Symbol of the Catholic Faith.

202. St. Luke says (Acts 8:1-3) that on the same day on which St. Stephen was stoned to death a great persecution arose against the Church in Jerusalem. He mentions especially that Saul devastated it, searching through the whole city for the followers of Christ in order to seize and denounce them before the magistrates. This he did to many of the believers, who were arrested, abused and killed in this persecution. Although it was very severe due to the hatred which the princes and priests had conceived against the Christians, and the zealous efforts of Saul in his jealous defense of the law of Moses of which he himself speaks in the letter to the Galatians (1:13), yet there was another hidden cause for this severity of the Jews, and though they felt its effects they were ignorant of the cause which originated it.

203. This secret cause was the dismay of Lucifer and his demons, who were much disturbed by the death of St. Stephen and began to stir up and excite themselves to diabolical wrath against the faithful, and especially against the Queen and Mistress of the Church, most holy Mary. For their greater confusion the Lord had permitted them to see how the Angels carried Her to St. Stephen, and from this instance of her extraordinary solicitude, and from the constancy and wisdom of St. Stephen, Lucifer concluded the powerful Queen would do the same with other martyrs who were to die for Christ, or at least She would aid and encourage them to despise torments or death and meet such persecutions with invincible courage. In his diabolical astuteness he calculated on torments and sorrows as a means of disheartening the faithful and drawing them away from the following of Christ, for it seemed to him that men love their life so much, and are so especially afraid of violent death and pain, they would be deterred and fall away from the faith rather than encounter such a fate. Upon this expectation the serpent continued to set his hopes, though through the ages of the Church he has been deceived by his own malice just as it happened with the Head of the Saints, Christ our Lord, when he first deceived himself.

204. But in this first beginning of the Church the dragon found himself quite disturbed and confused in his eagerness to irritate the Jews against St. Stephen. When he saw the Martyr die so gloriously he called together his demons and said to them: "I am much disturbed by the death of this disciple and by the favors he has received at the hands of that Woman, our Enemy, for if She thus helps the other disciples and followers of her Son we will not be able to overcome or mislead any of them by the threat of torments or death; on the contrary, they will all be animated by mutual example to suffer and die like their Master, and instead of succeeding in destroying them we ourselves will be overcome and oppressed, since our greatest torment and the signal triumph which they can bring over us will be their dying for the faith which we wish to wipe out. We will ruin ourselves by following this course, yet I do not find any other way, nor can I discover the proper mode of fighting against this incarnate God, his Mother, and his followers. Is it possible for men, who cling so much to life, to be so prodigal of it, and being so sensitive in regard to suffering will deliver themselves up to torments to imitate their Master? Nevertheless my just wrath will not be placated because of this. I will persuade others to give up their lives in support of my fallacies just as they do it for God; nor will all men merit the protection of that invincible Woman, nor be so courageous as to undergo such inhuman torments as I will devise. Let us go and excite our friends the Jews, so they may destroy this people and blot out from the face of the earth the Name of their Master."

205. Then Lucifer proceeded to put into execution his accursed designs, and with the innumerable multitudes of the demons he approached the princes and magistrates of the Jews and all the rabid unbelievers among the people, filling them with ungoverned fury and envy against the followers of Christ, and by his deceitful suggestions inflaming them with a false zeal for the law of Moses and the ancient traditions. It was not difficult to sow this cockle in hearts so perfidious and ravaged by sins, and hence they readily embraced the infernal suggestions. Immediately in many gatherings and conferences they consulted about putting a sudden end to all the disciples and followers of Christ. Some were for banishing them from Jerusalem; others from the kingdom of Israel; others for killing them all so that sect could be extinguished at one time; and still others were of the opinion they should be subjected to rigorous torments in order to deter others from joining, and be immediately dispossessed of their goods before they could give all to the Apostles. This persecution was so severe, as St. Luke tells us (Acts 8:1), that the seventy-two disciples fled from Jerusalem, scattering through Judea and Samaria; yet at the same time they began to preach through all the land with unfaltering courage. In Jerusalem remained the Apostles with most holy Mary and many of the faithful, though these latter remained hidden and as if were intimidated, securely hiding themselves from the diligent search which Saul instituted for their arrest.

206. The most blessed Mary through all this remained present and attentive. In the first place on the day of the death of St. Stephen She gave orders for his body to be recovered and buried (so even this was done by her command). She asked those who attended to this duty to bring Her a cross which the Martyr had habitually carried with him. He had made it in imitation of the Queen herself, for after the coming of the Holy Ghost the heavenly Lady carried a cross with Her, and by her example the other faithful commonly carried one in the primitive Church. She received the cross of St. Stephen with special veneration, not only for its own sake but because it had been in possession of the Martyr. She called him a Saint, and requested that as far possible all his blood be gathered and preserved reverently as of a Martyr already glorified. She extolled his sanctity and constancy in the presence of the Apostles and many of the faithful in order to console and encourage them in that tribulation.

207. In order to understand at least in part the greatness of her magnanimous Heart which was manifested by our Queen in this persecution and the other ones during her most holy life, it is necessary to summarize the gifts communicated to Her by the Most High, reducing them to the participation in his divine attributes, so special and ineffable and having such activity that the Heart of her Man trusted entirely in this powerful Woman (Prov. 31:11), entrusting Her with all the works *ad extra* which He executed by the omnipotence of his arm; for in her manner of operating most holy Mary transcended all the powers of mere creatures and resembled God himself, whose special image or figure She was found to be. No act or thought of men was hidden from Her, and She penetrated into all the schemes and machinations of the demons. She was ignorant of nothing which was proper to do in the Church. Yet even though all this was in her mind She was neither confused in the disposition of so many different matters, nor did She ever mix up one with another; nor was She ever flurried in their management, nor tired of the difficulties, nor oppressed by their multitude; nor was She forgetful of the more remote affairs because of the more proximate; nor was her prudence ever deficient, because it appeared to be immense and without limit. Hence She attended to all as if She had only one affair, and to each matter as if She had nothing else to attend to. Just as the sun, which without trouble, rest or intermittence illumines, vivifies and warms all without diminution of itself, so our great Queen,

elect as the sun* for the Catholic Church, governed, vivified and encouraged all its children without excluding any.

208. When therefore She saw the Church disturbed, harassed and afflicted by the persecution of the demons and the men instigated by them, She turned upon the originators of this evil and imperiously commanded Lucifer and his ministers to descend into hell, and they fell howling into the abyss without power of resistance. They remained thus bound and imprisoned for eight entire days when they were again permitted to rise. Thereupon She called the Apostles and with consoling words encouraged them to remain firm and hope for the divine assistance in this tribulation. Strengthened by this exhortation none of them left Jerusalem. The disciples, who due to their great number could not conceal themselves properly, took leave of their Mother and Mistress and departed from Jerusalem with her benediction. All of them She exhorted and encouraged, admonishing them not to be disheartened because of persecutions nor give up preaching Christ crucified, and they faithfully continued their preaching in Judea, Samaria, and other provinces. In their labors She comforted and assisted them through her holy Angels, inspiring them with courage and bearing them to different localities whenever necessary, as happened to Philip on the way to Gaza when he baptized the Ethiopian, the servant of Queen Candace, as related by St. Luke in chapter VIII of the Acts of the Apostles (26ff.). In order to assist the faithful in the hour of death She was likewise accustomed to send her Angels, and after they died She took care to assist the souls who went to purgatory.

209. The cares and labors of the Apostles in this persecution were much greater than those of the other faithful, for as the masters and founders of the Church it was proper for them to extend their solicitude to all inside as well as outside Jerusalem. Though they were full of knowledge and the gifts of the Holy Ghost, yet even with all these benefits the undertaking was so arduous and the opposition so powerful that many times without the counsel and direction of their singular Teacher they would have found themselves somewhat overcome and oppressed. For this reason they frequently consulted Her, and She called them to Her and arranged the meetings and conferences most appropriate for dealing with these problems according to the occasions and business at hand, for She alone fully understood the present affairs and foresaw with certainty those of the future. By her orders they went forth to attend upon matters outside of Jerusalem whenever necessary, as when St. Peter and St. John went to Samaria upon hearing its inhabitants had received the preaching of the faith (Acts 8:14). Amid all these occupations of her own and the tribulations of the faithful, whom She loved as her children, the great Lady retained all the serenity and tranquil peace of her spirit, without falling away in the least point from the utmost perfection.

210. She so disposed of matters that She could frequently retire, for although the exterior actions did not hinder her continual prayer She reserved many secret and special works for times of solitude. She prostrated Herself, humbled Herself to the dust, sighed and wept for the salvation of mortals, and bewailed the fall of so many whom She recognized as reprobates. Since She held written in her most pure Heart the evangelical law and had the image of the Church stamped therein, along with the discourse which took place within the Church and the trials and tribulations which the faithful had to suffer, She conferred about all this between the Lord and Herself in order to dispose and order all its affairs by the divine light and science of the holy will of the Most High. There She renewed her participation in the essence of God and his perfections necessary for such divine works required for the government of the Church, which She did

* cf. *Antiphon for the Magnificat*, 1st Vespers of Aug. 15, the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary [Ed.]

without failing in anything and with such plenitude of wisdom and sanctity that She seemed entirely more than a mere creature, although that is what She was. In all her thoughts She was most exalted; in wisdom She was beyond compare; in counsels most prudent; in her decisions most equitable and accurate; in her works most holy; in her words true and sincere; in all goodness perfect and beautiful. Toward the weak She was most kind; toward the humble sweet and loving; toward the proud reserved and majestic. Her own excellence did not inflate Her, nor adversity disturb Her, nor labors cast Her down. In all her activities She was a faithful copy of her divine Son.

211. The most prudent Mother bore in mind that the disciples, having dispersed to preach the name and faith of Christ our Savior, had as yet no formula or express creed to guide themselves uniformly in their preaching without difference or contradiction so all the faithful could believe one and the same express truths. Moreover She knew the Apostles would soon have to go forth over the whole world in order to spread and establish the Church through their preaching, and that it was proper for all to be united in their doctrine upon which was to be founded all the perfection of a Christian life. Therefore the most prudent Mother of Wisdom desired to see all the divine mysteries which the Apostles were to preach and the faithful believe reduced to a short formula, for if those truths were molded into a few articles they could more conveniently be brought to the mind of all, the whole Church would be united in one belief without any essential difference, and the whole spiritual edifice of the Gospel would thus rest and be built upon the same firm columns of one foundation.

212. In order to prepare for this work, the importance of which She recognized, She presented her desires to the Lord, who had inspired them, and for more than forty days She persevered in this prayer with fasting, prostrations, and other exercises. Hence in the same way as it was proper for the giving of the written law that Moses, as mediator between God and the people, fasted and prayed for forty days on mount Sinai (Ex. 34:28), so also for the new law of grace (Christ our Savior being its Author and the Mediator between the eternal Father and men) it was proper for most holy Mary to mediate between men and her most holy Son, in order for the evangelical Church to receive this new law written into their hearts reduced to articles of faith which would never change and never show any deficiency because they are divine and indefectible truths. One day, while persevering in these petitions, She spoke thus to the Lord: "Most high Lord and eternal God, Creator and Ruler of all the universe, in thy ineffable kindness Thou hast begun the magnificent work of thy holy Church. It is not according to thy wisdom to leave imperfect any works of thy divine right hand; raise then to its high perfection this work which Thou hast so gloriously begun. Let not the sins of mortals hinder Thee, my God, when above their malice is clamoring the blood and death of thy and my Onlybegotten, for this blood does not call out for vengeance as the blood of Abel (Gen. 4:10), but rather pleads for pardon for all who are guilty. Look upon the new children whom the blood of Christ has engendered for Thee, and upon those who are to be engendered in the Church during the future ages. Give then thy divine Spirit to Peter thy vicar and to the rest of the Apostles so they may arrange into a convenient form the truths upon which thy Church is to be founded, and so its children may know what to believe without differences of opinion."

213. In order to answer in person these prayers of his Mother her divine Son descended from heaven with immense glory and spoke to Her: "My beloved Mother, be relieved in thy affectionate anxieties, and let thy ardent thirst for my glory and for the increase of my Church be satiated by my presence and sight. It is in my power to fulfill thy desires, and Thou art the one to oblige Me to do it, since I shall deny nothing to thy desires and prayers." During these words

most holy Mary was prostrate on the ground in adoration of the divinity and humanity of her Son and true God, but the Lord raised Her up and filled Her with ineffable joy and jubilation by giving Her his benediction and enriching Her with new favors and gifts of his right hand. She remained for some time in this joy of her Son and Lord amid the most exalted and mysterious colloquies by which He moderated the anxieties which She suffered due to her cares for the Church, for His Majesty promised Her great benefits and gifts for it.

214. In answer to her prayer for the Apostles, besides promising to assist them in preparing the Symbol of the faith, the Lord informed his Mother of the very wording of the propositions or articles of which the Creed was to be composed. Of all this the most prudent Lady was well capable, as was explained more fully in the second Part of this History (*Tran.* 22); but now, when the time had arrived for executing what had been intended so long before, He desired to renew all of it in the most pure Heart of his Virgin Mother so the fundamental truths of the Church would flow from the lips of Christ himself. It was also necessary to prepare anew the humility of the great Lady so She could conform to the will of her most holy Son in hearing Herself called in the Creed the Mother of God and a Virgin before and after his birth while yet living in mortal flesh among those who were to preach and believe this divine truth; for it was not to be expected that She who had been chosen by God for her humility in order to work the greatest of his wonders (Lk. 1:48) would be willing of Herself to publish this prerogative, though it was more weighty to actually be Mother and Virgin, which She knew Herself to be, than to hear it preached in the Church.

215. Christ our Lord took leave of his Blessed Mother and returned to the right hand of the Father. He then sent an inspiration into the heart of his vicar St. Peter and the rest of the Apostles for all of them to arrange the Symbol of the universal faith of the Church. With this proposal they sought to confer with the heavenly Mistress concerning its opportuneness and the measures to be taken for this purpose. They resolved to fast and persevere in prayer for ten continuous days in order to receive the inspiration of the Holy Ghost in this arduous affair. Having completed these ten days, which were also the last ten of the forty in which the Queen had communicated with the Lord about this matter, the twelve Apostles met in the presence of the great Mother and Teacher of all, and St. Peter spoke to them as follows:

216. "My dearest brethren, the mercy of God by his infinite goodness, and through the merits of our Savior and Master Jesus, has favored his holy Church by so gloriously multiplying her children as we have known and experienced in these few days. For this purpose his powerful arm has multiplied miracles and prodigies, and daily renews them through our ministry, having chosen us (although unworthy) as the instruments of his divine will in this work and for the glory and honor of his holy Name. Together with these favors He has sent us tribulations and persecutions of the demon and of the world so we may imitate our Savior and Leader, and so the Church, evenly ballasted, can reach more securely the port of rest and eternal felicity. The disciples have scattered to the neighboring cities due to the anger of the princes of the priests, and are preaching in all these places the faith of Christ our Lord and Redeemer. We must also soon depart and preach throughout the earth according to the command of the Lord before ascending into heaven (Mt. 28:19). For us to preach one and the same doctrine, and for the faithful to believe it, since the holy faith has to be one, just as there is one Baptism in which this faith is received (Eph. 4:5), it is convenient that since we are now all congregated together in the Lord we establish the truths and mysteries which we are to propose expressly to all the faithful, so all without any difference may believe these truths in all the nations of the world. It is the infallible promise of the Lord that where two or three shall be gathered in his name He shall be

in their midst (Mt. 18:20). Confiding in his word we firmly hope He shall now assist us with his divine Spirit to understand and define, in his name and by an unchangeable decree, the articles to be established in his holy Church in order to found the Church upon them until the end of the world, since it must remain until then.”

217. All the Apostles consented to this proposal of St. Peter. Then he celebrated Mass in which he gave Communion to most holy Mary and the Apostles, whereupon all of them, including the Blessed Mother, prostrated themselves in prayer calling upon the Holy Ghost. After continuing their prayers for some time, they heard the rumbling of thunder as on the first coming down of the Holy Ghost upon the gathering of the faithful; at the same time the Cenacle was filled with light and splendor and all were enlightened by the Holy Ghost. Then most holy Mary asked each of the Apostles to define a mystery according as the divine Spirit would inspire them. Thereupon St. Peter began, and was followed by the rest in the following order:

ST. PETER

I believe in God, the Father almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.

ST. ANDREW

And in Jesus Christ, his only Son our Lord.

ST. JAMES THE GREATER

Who was conceived by the work of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary.

ST. JOHN

Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried.

ST. THOMAS

He descended into hell, on the third day He arose from the dead.

ST. JAMES THE LESS

He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.

ST. PHILIP

From thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

ST. BARTHOLOMEW

I believe in the Holy Ghost.

ST. MATTHEW

The holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints.

ST. SIMON

The forgiveness of sins.

ST. THADDEUS

The resurrection of the flesh.

ST. MATTHIAS

Life everlasting. Amen.

218. This Symbol, which we ordinarily call the Creed, the Apostles established after the martyrdom of St. Stephen and before the end of the first year after the death of the Savior. Afterwards, in order to refute the Arian and other heresies, the Church, in the councils held because of these heresies, explained more fully the mysteries contained in the Apostles' Creed and composed the Symbol or Creed now chanted in the Mass. But in substance both are one and the same, and contain the fourteen articles in which are proposed to us the Christian doctrine in order to catechize us in the faith, and which we are all bound to believe in order to be saved. As soon as the Apostles had finished pronouncing this Symbol the Holy Ghost approved of it by permitting a voice to be heard in their midst saying: "Thou hast decided well." Then the great Queen and Lady of heaven with all the Apostles gave thanks to the Most High, and She thanked also the Apostles for having merited the assistance of the divine Spirit in order to be his fit instruments in promoting the glory of the Lord and the good of the Church. In confirmation of her faith, and as an example to the faithful, the most prudent Teacher knelt at the feet of St. Peter and solemnly declared her belief in the holy Catholic faith as contained in the Symbol they had just finished pronouncing. This She did for Herself and in the name of all the faithful, saying to St. Peter: "My lord, whom I recognize as the Vicar of my most holy Son, in thy hands I, a vile wormlet, in my name and in the name of all the faithful of the Church, confess and declare all thou hast set down as the divine and infallible truths of the Catholic Church, and in it I bless and exalt the Most High from whom it proceeds." She kissed the hands of the Vicar of Christ and of the rest of the Apostles. Thus She was the first one openly to profess the Catholic faith after it had been formulated into articles.

INSTRUCTION GIVEN ME BY THE GREAT QUEEN OF THE ANGELS, MOST HOLY MARY.

219. My daughter, besides the mysteries thou hast recorded in this chapter I desire for thy greater information and consolation to manifest to thee other secrets of my activity. After the Apostles had formulated the Creed, thou must know that I repeated it many times during the day on my knees and with the most profound reverence. And whenever the words *born of the Virgin Mary* occurred, I prostrated myself upon the earth with such humility, gratitude, and praise of the Most High as no creature can comprehend. In these acts of devotion I had present in my mind all mortals in order to make up for the irreverence with which they pronounce these so venerable words of the Creed. Through my intercession the Lord was induced to inspire the Church to repeat so many times the *Credo*, the *Ave Maria*, and the *Pater Noster* in the divine office, to accustom the religious to humble themselves in reciting them, and to genuflect in the *Credo* of the Mass at the words *Et incarnatus est*, etc. Thus the Church in some part seeks to pay the debt it owes to the Lord for having vouchsafed such knowledge, and for the mysteries, so worthy of reverence and gratitude, contained in the Creed.

220. Many times my holy Angels sang to me the *Credo* with wonderful harmony and sweetness, rejoicing my spirit. Sometimes they would sing the *Ave Maria*, including those words: *Blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus*. Whenever they pronounced this most holy Name, or that of Mary, they made a most profound bow, causing in me new effects of loving humility, abasing me to the very earth at the thought of how far exalted is the being of God above my own

terrestrial existence. O my daughter, bear in mind the reverence with which thou must recite the *Credo, Pater* and *Ave*, and do not make thyself guilty of the thoughtless rudeness of many of the faithful in this matter. The frequency with which these prayers and divine words are repeated in the Church must not infringe upon the proper reverence due to them. This presumption arises from pronouncing them merely with the lips without meditating upon their meaning. I desire them to be to thee a subject of continual meditation, and for this purpose the Most High has given thee a taste for studying the catechism. Thou shalt please the Lord and me if thou carry it with thee and read it many times as thou hast been accustomed to do and as I again charge thee to do from now on. Recommend it also to thy subjects, for this kind of knowledge is the jewel which must adorn the spouses of Christ and which all Christians should bear about with them.

221. It is also for thy sake I inform thee of the care which I had to ensure the Apostles compose the Symbol of the faith as soon as it was necessary for the welfare of the Church. To know what will advance the glory and service of God and benefit one's own conscience and not to execute it, or at least to make no effort toward it, is a very reprehensible lukewarmness; and it is especially shameful in those men who, whenever they lack any temporal good, brook no delay and clamorously ask God to satisfy their wishes, as for instance when they fail in health or fear bad crops, or when they dread being deprived of much less necessary or even superfluous and dangerous things. At the same time, though they recognize their deep obligations to God, they pretend not to understand them, or delay their fulfillment out of negligence and lack of love. Do thou guard thyself against this disorder and never permit it. Just as I was most solicitous in that which pertained to the service of the children of the Church, so do thou likewise be punctual in all thou dost perceive to be the will of God, whether it is for the benefit of thy soul or for the benefit of thy neighbor, and thus thou shalt imitate my example.