

CHAPTER XIV

The Conversion of St. Paul, and how Most Holy Mary Labored in It; Other Hidden Mysteries.

248. Our Mother the Church, governed by the divine Spirit, celebrates the conversion of St. Paul as one of the greatest miracles of the law of grace and for the universal consolation of sinners, for from a contumelious and blasphemous persecutor of the name of Christ, as St. Paul calls himself (I Tim. 1:13), he was changed into an Apostle obtaining mercy through divine grace. Since our great Queen bore such a prominent part in his obtaining mercy, this rare miracle of the Omnipotent must not be passed over in this History; moreover, its greatness can be better understood if the state of St. Paul when he was called Saul and was a persecutor of the Church is explained, and when the causes are known which induced him to signalize himself as such a bitter defender of the law of Moses and a persecutor of Christ.

249. St. Paul was distinguished in Judaism for two reasons: One was his own character, and the other was the diligence of the demon in availing himself of his naturally good qualities. By his natural condition Saul had a generous heart and was magnanimous, most noble, diligent, active, efficient, and constant in what he intended. He had acquired many of the moral virtues, and esteemed himself a great professor of the law of Moses and studious and learned in it, though actually he was ignorant (as he confessed to his disciple Timothy [Ib.]) since all his knowledge was human and terrestrial; he understood the law like many Israelites, only on the surface, without its spirit* and the divine light which was necessary to understand it legitimately and penetrate its mysteries. Yet since his ignorance seemed to him real knowledge, and since he was gifted with a retentive memory and keen understanding, he was a great zealot for the traditions of the rabbis (Gal. 1:14). He judged it outrageous and absurd that against them and against Moses (as he thought) had been published a new law, invented by a Man crucified as a criminal, when Moses had received their law on the mount given by God himself (Ex. 34). Hence he conceived a great abhorrence and contempt for Christ, his law, and his disciples. He was assisted in this error by his own moral virtues (if that can be called virtue which was devoid of true charity), for by them he boasted of his ability to correct the errors of others, as happens to many of the children of Adam who content themselves in the performance of some virtuous work in correcting others, and by this false satisfaction pay no attention to the reformation of other greater vices in themselves.[†] In this deception lived and worked Saul, very much attached to the antiquity of the Mosaic law, ordained by God himself, the honor of which he believed he was upholding; yet he did not understand the ancient law in its ceremonies and figures was but temporal and not eternal, and was necessarily to be abrogated by another Legislator more powerful and wise than Moses, as Moses himself had said (Dt. 18:15).

250. To this indiscreet zeal of Saul and his vehement condition was joined the malice of Lucifer and his ministers in order to irritate him, incite him, and increase the hatred he had against the law of Christ our Savior. I have many times in the course of this History spoken of the councils of wickedness and infernal conspiracies which this dragon fabricated against the holy Church (*Tran.* 714; *Cor.* 204); among them was the search with highest vigilance for men who by their inclinations and customs would be most suitable and accommodating to be used as

* cf. II Cor. 3:6; I Tim. 6:20 [Ed.]

† cf. Lk. 6:41-42 [Ed.]

instruments and executors of his wickedness. Lucifer by himself or with his demons, though they are able to tempt men singly, cannot raise their banner in public and make themselves heads of any sect or sedition against God if they are not aided in this by some man whom others follow so blindly in the dark. This cruel enemy was infuriated by the happy beginnings of the holy Church; he feared its progress and burned with envy to see beings of a lower nature than himself raised to the participation of the Divinity and the glory which he himself had lost. He recognized the inclinations of Saul, his habits, and the state of his interior, and all seemed to harmonize well with his own desires of destroying the Church of Christ through the hand of unbelievers who would deliberately execute his evil schemes.

251. Lucifer consulted the other demons concerning this wicked plan in a meeting held especially for this purpose, and by the common agreement of all the dragon issued the decree whereby he himself, along with other demons, would accompany Saul at all times and instill into his mind suggestions and reasonings adapted to the anger he had against the Apostles and the whole flock of Christ, for he would accept all such suggestions; and in order to gain their triumphs they were to irritate him under the color of false and apparent virtue. The demons executed this resolve to the letter and without losing any occasion. Although Saul was dissatisfied and opposed to the doctrine of our Savior even before his death on the Cross, yet he had not yet declared himself so zealous a defender of the law of Moses and adversary of the Lord; it was only at the death of St. Stephen that he showed the wrath which the infernal dragon had roused against the followers of Christ. Since that enemy had found the heart of Saul on that occasion so ready to execute all his malicious suggestions, he became so arrogant in his malice that it seemed to him that as a persecutor Saul left nothing to be desired, and this man would offer no resistance to any malice he could ever propose.

252. By this impious confidence Lucifer expected that Saul would by himself take the lives of all the Apostles, and with still greater presumption even the life of most holy Mary; to such insanity rose the pride of this most cruel dragon. But he deceived himself, for the disposition of Saul was most noble and generous, and therefore it appeared to him beneath his dignity and honor to stoop to such crimes and act the part of an assassin when he could, as it seemed to him, destroy the law of Christ by the power of reasoning and open justice. He felt a still greater horror at the thought of killing the most blessed Mother of Jesus because of the regard due to Her as a woman, and because he had seen Her so composed and constant in the labors and Passion of Christ, and hence She seemed to him a grand woman and worthy of veneration. She had indeed won his respect, together with some compassion for her sorrows and afflictions, the magnitude of which had become publicly known; thus he gave no admittance to the inhuman suggestions of the demon against the life of most holy Mary. This compassion for the sufferings of the Queen was of no small help in hastening his conversion. Neither did he further entertain the treacherous designs against the Apostles, though Lucifer sought to make their assassination appear as a deed worthy of his courageous spirit. Rejecting all these wicked thoughts he resolved to incite all the Jews to persecute the Church until it was destroyed together with the name of Christ.

253. The dragon and his ministers remained satisfied with this determination of Saul, since they could not achieve more. The dreadful wrath of these demons against God and his creatures can be estimated from the fact that on that very day they held another meeting in order to consult how they could preserve the life of this man whom they had found so well adapted to execute their malice. These deadly enemies well know they have no jurisdiction over the lives of men and can neither give nor take life unless permitted by God on some particular occasion; nevertheless, they wished to make themselves the guardians and the physicians of the life and

health of Saul as far as their power extended, moving his imagination so he might guard himself against whatever was harmful and use whatever was more healthful, applying other natural causes which could preserve health. Yet with all their efforts they were unable to hinder the work of grace when God so desired it. Far were they from suspecting that Saul would ever accept the faith of Christ, and the life which they were trying to preserve and lengthen was to redound to their own ruin and torment. Such events are ordained by the wisdom of the Most High, leaving the demon deceived in his malicious counsels, falling into the pit and snare he had set against God (Ps. 56:7), so all his machinations would come to serve the divine will, which he cannot resist.

254. Such were the decrees of the highest Wisdom so the conversion of Saul would be more wonderful and glorious. With this intention God permitted Lucifer after the death of St. Stephen to instigate Saul to go to the chief priests with fierce threats against the disciples of Christ who had spread out from Jerusalem, and to solicit permission for bringing them as prisoners to Jerusalem from wherever he would find them (Acts 9:1). For this enterprise Saul offered his person and possessions, and even his life; at his own expense and without salary he made this journey so the new law preached by the disciples of the Crucified might not prevail against the law of his ancestors. This offer was readily favored by the high priest and his counselors, and they immediately gave to Saul the commission he asked, especially to go to Damascus where according to the information they had some of the disciples had withdrawn after leaving Jerusalem. He prepared for the journey, hiring officers of justice and some soldiers to accompany him. But by far his most numerous escort were the many legions of demons who in order to assist him in this enterprise came forth from hell, hoping with all this show of force and through Saul to be able to make an end of the Church and entirely devastate it with fire and blood. This was truly the intention of Saul, and the one with which Lucifer and his demons sought to inspire him and his companions. But let us leave him for the present on his journey to Damascus, anxious to seize all the disciples of Christ he would find in the synagogues of that city.

255. Nothing of all this was unknown to the great Queen of heaven, for in addition to her knowledge and vision penetrating to the inmost thoughts of men and demons the Apostles were solicitous in keeping Her informed of all that befell the followers of her Son. Long before this time She had known that Saul was to be an Apostle of Christ, a preacher to the gentiles and a man distinguished and wonderful in the Church, for of all these things her Son had informed Her as I said in the second Part of this History (*Tran.* 23). Yet as She saw the persecution becoming more violent and the glorious fruits and results of the conversion of Saul delayed, and since She also saw how the disciples of Christ, who knew nothing of the secret intentions of the Most High, were afflicted and somewhat discouraged at the fury and persistence of his persecution, the most kind Mother was filled with great sorrow. Considering in her heavenly prudence how important this affair was, She roused Herself to new courage and confidence in her prayers for the welfare of the Church and the conversion of Saul. Prostrate in the presence of her Son She poured forth the following prayer:

256. "Most high Lord, Son of the eternal Father, the living God and true God of true God, engendered of his own and indivisible substance, and by the ineffable condescension of thine infinite goodness my Son and the life of my soul, how shall I thy slave, to whom Thou hast commended thy beloved Church, continue to live if the persecution set in motion by thy enemies against it prevails and not be conquered by thy immense power? How can my heart suffer to see the price of thy precious blood and death despised and profaned? If Thou, my Lord, givest to me as my children those who are engendered in thy Church, and if I am to love them and look upon

them with the love of a Mother, how shall I find solace in seeing them oppressed and destroyed because they confess thy holy Name and love Thee with a sincere heart? Thine is the power and the wisdom (I Par. 29:11), and it is not just that the infernal dragon boast against Thee, he who is the enemy of thy Name and the calumniator of thy brethren,* my children. My Son, confound the ancient pride of this serpent, who again rises up against Thee, proud and pouring out his fury against the simple sheep of thy flock. Behold how he has deceived Saul, whom Thou hast chosen and destined as thine Apostle. It is time, my God, for Thee to execute thine omnipotence and subdue that soul, through whom and in whom such glory shall redound to thy holy Name and so much good be secured for all the world.”

257. Most holy Mary persevered in this prayer for a long time, offering to suffer and die if necessary for the welfare of the holy Church and the conversion of Saul. Since the infinite wisdom of her most holy Son had foreseen He would work this wonder by means of the prayers of his most loving Mother, He descended from heaven in person, appearing to Her and manifesting Himself in the Cenacle, where She was praying in the retirement of her oratory. His Majesty spoke to Her with the accustomed love and caresses of a Son and said to Her: “My Friend and my Mother, in whom I find the satisfaction and pleasure of my perfect will, what are thy petitions? Tell Me what Thou dost desire.” In the presence of her most holy Son the humble Queen prostrated Herself to the floor as was her custom, and adoring Him as the true God She said: “My Lord most high, far in advance dost Thou know the thoughts and hearts of creatures, and my desires are open to thine eyes. My petition proceeds from one who knows thine infinite charity for men, and as the Mother of the Church, the advocate of sinners, and thy slave. If I have received all from thy immense love without meriting it, I cannot fear that my desires for thy glory shall be despised. I ask Thee, my Son, to look upon the affliction of thy Church, and as a loving Father hasten the relief of thy children engendered by thy most precious blood.”

258. The Lord desired to hear the voice and loving clamors of his most beloved Mother and Spouse, and therefore He allowed Himself to be petitioned further on this occasion, as if holding back what He desired to grant and could not refuse to such merits and charity. Using this artifice of divine love Christ our Good conversed with his sweetest Mother while She pleaded for the remedy of that persecution and the conversion of Saul. Among other things He said: “My Mother, if my mercy condescends to show clemency with Saul, how shall my justice be satisfied? He persists in the deepest incredulity and malice, serving with all his heart my enemies in order to destroy my Church and blot out my Name from the face of the earth, thus meriting my just indignation and chastisement.” To this reasoning, so conclusive for the dictates of justice, the Mother of wisdom and mercy did not lack a response and solution, and She answered: “Lord God eternal, my Son, in choosing Paul for thine Apostle and a vessel of election[†] in the acceptance of thy divine mind and writing him in thy eternal memory, his sins were no impediment, and neither did these waters extinguish the fire of thy divine love (Cant. 8:7) as Thou thyself hast manifested to me. More powerful and efficacious were thine infinite merits by which Thou didst order the framework of thy beloved Church, and hence I do not ask anything which Thou thyself hast not determined upon. Yet it grieves me, my Son, that this soul walks along a great precipice toward his perdition and that of others (if his perdition could be like that of others), that the glory of thy Name is delayed, along with the joy of the Angels (Lk. 15:10) and Saints, the consolation of the just, the confidence sinners shall receive, and the confusion of

* cf. Apoc. 12:10 [Ed.]

† cf. Acts 9:15 [Ed.]

thy enemies. Ah then, my Son and Lord, despise not the entreaties of thy Mother; may thy divine decrees be executed and may I see thy Name magnified, for the time and the occasion are opportune, and my heart cannot suffer such good for the Church to be delayed."

259. During this petition the fire of charity in the most chaste bosom of the great Queen and Lady became so inflamed that without doubt it would have consumed her natural life if the Lord himself had not preserved it by miraculous power, though in order to oblige Himself still more by such excessive love in a mere creature He permitted the most blessed Mother to suffer some sensible pain, and as it were reach the point of fainting. Yet her Son, who to our way of understanding could no longer resist the force of such love which wounded his Heart, consoled and renewed Her, showing Himself obliged by her prayers, saying: "My Mother, chosen among all creatures, let thy will be done without delay. I shall do with Saul all Thou dost ask, and shall place him in such a state that from now on he shall be a defender of my Church which he persecutes and a preacher of my Name and glory. I go now to transform him and receive him into my friendship and grace."

260. Then Christ our Good disappeared from the presence of his most holy Mother, leaving Her still engaged in prayer and furnished with clear insight into what was to happen. Shortly afterward the Lord appeared to Saul near the city of Damascus, where he was hastening on his way and surpassing himself in indignation against Jesus. The Lord manifested Himself to Saul in a cloud of admirable resplendence and with immense glory, and at the same time Saul was surrounded with divine light both around and within him, overwhelming his heart and senses without power to resist such strength. He fell suddenly from his horse to the ground (Acts 9:4), and at the same time he heard a voice from on high saying: *Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?* Completely bewildered and full of dread he responded (Ib. 5-6): *Who art Thou, Lord?* The voice replied: *"I am Jesus whom thou persecutest; it is hard for thee to kick against the goad of my power."* Again Saul answered with greater fear and trembling: "Lord, what dost Thou command of me and *what wilt Thou have me to do?*" The companions of Saul heard these questions and answers, though they did not see Christ our Savior, who was seen by Saul; yet they did see the splendor surrounding him, and all of them were terrified and full of great fear and admiration at such an unexpected and sudden event, and were for some time nearly dumbfounded.

261. This new wonder, never before seen in the world, had greater and more efficacious secret and hidden effects than what could be perceived by the senses; for not only was Saul subdued and cast to the ground, blinded and debilitated in body, so much so that if the divine power had not sustained him he would have immediately expired, but in his interior he was left changed into an entirely new man, experiencing more of a change than when he passed from nothingness to the natural existence he possessed. He was farther removed from what he was before than light from darkness, or the highest heaven from the lowest earth, since he was changed from an image of the demon into that of one of the highest and most ardent Seraphim. This triumph over Lucifer and his demons had been specially reserved by God in his divine wisdom and omnipotence, so in virtue of the Passion and Death of Christ this dragon and his malice would be vanquished by the human nature of one man in whom the effects of grace and Redemption were set in opposition to the sin of Lucifer and all its effects. Thus it happened that in the same short time in which Lucifer through pride was changed from an angel to a demon, the power of Christ changed Saul from a demon into an angel in grace. In the angelic nature the highest beauty was lowered to consummate ugliness, and in the human nature the greatest ugliness was raised to perfect beauty. Lucifer descended as the enemy of God from heaven to the deepest abyss of the earth, and a man ascended as a friend of God from the earth to the highest heaven.

262. And since this triumph would not have been sufficiently glorious if the Lord had not given more than Lucifer had lost, the Omnipotent wished to add in Saul an additional triumph to his victory over the demon. For Lucifer, although he fell from that exceedingly high grace which he had received, had never possessed the beatific vision, nor had he made himself worthy of it, and hence could not lose what he did not possess; but Paul, immediately upon disposing himself for justification and gaining grace, began to partake of glory and clearly saw the Divinity, though this vision was gradual. O invincible virtue of the divine power! O infinite efficacy of the merits of the life and death of Christ! It was certainly reasonable and just that if the malice of sin in one instant changed an angel into a demon, the grace of the Redeemer would be more powerful and abound more than sin (Rom. 5:20), raising up from it a man not only in order to place him into such grace but into such glory. Greater is this wonder than the creation of heaven and earth with all the creatures; greater than to give sight to the blind, health to the sick, or life to the dead. Let us express our joy to sinners on the hope inspired by this wonderful justification, since we have for our Restorer, our Father, and our Brother the same Lord who justified Paul, and He is not less powerful nor less holy for us than for him.

263. During the time in which Paul lay prostrate upon the earth he was entirely renewed by sanctifying grace and other infused gifts, restored and illumined proportionately in all his interior faculties, and thus he was prepared to be elevated to the empyrean heaven, which is called the third heaven. He himself confesses that he did not know whether he was thus elevated in body or only in spirit (II Cor. 12:2), but there, by more than ordinary vision, though in a transient manner, he saw the Divinity clearly and intuitively. In addition to the being of God and his attributes of infinite perfection, he recognized the mystery of the Incarnation and human Redemption, all the mysteries of the law of grace, and the state of the Church. He saw the peerless blessing of his justification and the prayer of St. Stephen for him, and still more clearly was he made aware of the prayers of most holy Mary and how his conversion had been hastened through Her, that after Christ her merits had made him acceptable in the sight of God. From that hour he was filled with gratitude and deepest veneration and devotion to the great Queen of heaven, whose dignity was now manifest to him and whom he thenceforth acknowledged as his Restoratrix. He likewise recognized the office of Apostle to which he was called, and that in it he was to labor and suffer unto death. In conjunction with these mysteries were revealed to him many other secret words, affirming he was not permitted to manifest them (Ib. 4). He offered himself in sacrifice to the will of God in all things, as he showed afterwards in the course of his life. The most blessed Trinity accepted this sacrifice and offering of his lips, and in the presence of the whole court of heaven named and designated him as the preacher and teacher of the gentiles, and as a vessel of election for carrying through the world the name of the Most High.

264. For the Blessed in heaven this day was one of great accidental joy and rejoicing, and all of them composed new canticles of praise and exaltation of the divine power for such a rare and extraordinary miracle. If at the conversion of any sinner they receive new joy (Lk. 15:7), what joy was theirs in seeing thus manifested the grandeur of the Lord and his mercy, and such an immense blessing conferred upon all mortals for the glory of his holy Church? Saul came out of his rapture changed into St. Paul, and rising from the ground he seemed to be blind, being unable to see the light of the sun. His companions brought him to Damascus to the house of one of his acquaintances, and there to the admiration of all he remained three days without eating or drinking, engaged in most exalted prayer. He prostrated himself on the ground, and since he was now in a state to deplore his sins, with deepest sorrow and detestation of his past life he prayed: "Woe is me! In what darkness and blindness have I lived, and how far have I hastened on the

way of eternal perdition! O infinite love! O charity without measure! O most sweet gentleness of the eternal goodness! Who, my Lord and immense God, has obliged Thee to such a demonstration of thy clemency with this vile worm, this blasphemer and thy enemy? Yet who could oblige Thee except Thyself and the pleadings of thy Mother and Spouse? When in blindness and darkness I persecuted Thee, Thou, most kind Lord, didst come to meet me. When I proceeded to shed the innocent blood which shall always cry out against me, Thou, who art the God of mercies, didst wash and purify me with thy own blood and didst make me a partaker of thy ineffable divinity. How shall I forever sing such unheard-of mercies?^{*} How shall I weep over a life so odious in thine eyes? The heavens and the earth proclaim thy glory. I shall preach thy holy Name and shall defend it in the midst of thine enemies.” Such and other aspirations St. Paul repeated with matchless sorrow, with acts of the most ardent charity, and with profound humility and gratitude.

265. On the third day after the fall and conversion of Saul the Lord spoke in a vision to one of the disciples named Ananias living in Damascus (Acts 9:10ff.). Calling him by name as his servant and friend the Lord told him to go to the house of a man named Judas in a certain district of the city and there to find Saul of Tarsus, whom he would find engaged in prayer. At the same time Saul also had a vision in which he saw and recognized the disciple Ananias coming to him and restoring sight to him by the imposition of hands; yet Ananias was at that time unaware of this vision of Saul. Thus he answered: “Lord, I am informed this man has persecuted thy saints in Jerusalem and wrought great havoc among them; and not satisfied with this, he has now come with warrants from the chief priests in order to seize anyone who invokes thy Name. Hence dost Thou command a simple sheep like myself to go in search of the wolf that desires to devour it?” The Lord replied: “*Go thy way, for the one thou judgest to be my enemy is to Me a vessel of election to carry my Name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel.* And I can, as I shall, show him what he must suffer for my Name.” And the disciple understood all that had happened.

266. Relying on this word of the Lord, Ananias obeyed and went at once to the house in which St. Paul then was. He found him in prayer and said to him: *Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus hath sent me, He that appeared to thee in the way as thou camest, that thou mayest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost* (Ib. 17). He also received Holy Communion[†] at the hands of Ananias by which he recovered and was comforted. for all these benefits he rendered gratitude to the Author from whose hand they proceeded. Then he ate, receiving bodily nourishment which he had not tasted for three days. He remained for some time in Damascus, conferring and conversing with the disciples in that city. He prostrated himself at their feet, asking their pardon and begging them to receive him as their servant^Δ and brother, even as the least and most unworthy of them all. At their approval and counsel he went forth publicly to preach Christ as the Messiah and Redeemer of the world, and with such fervor, wisdom and zeal that he brought confusion to the unbelieving Jews in the numerous synagogues of Damascus. All wondered at this unexpected change, and in great astonishment said: By any chance could this not be the man who in Jerusalem has persecuted with fire and blood all who invoke that Name? And has he not come to bring them prisoners to the chief priests of that city? Then what change is this which we see in him?

* cf. Ps. 88:2 [Ed.]

[†] After receiving Baptism; cf. Acts 9:18 and par. 271 below [Ed.]

^Δ cf. Mt. 20:27; 23:11 [Ed.]

267. St. Paul grew stronger each day, and with increasing force continued his preaching to the Jews and gentiles (Ib. 20), so much so they schemed to take away his life; and then happened what we shall touch upon later. The miraculous conversion of St. Paul took place one year and one month after the martyrdom of St. Stephen, on the twenty-fifth of January, the same day on which the holy Church celebrates that feast. It was in the year thirty-six of the birth of Christ, because St. Stephen (as stated in chapter XI*) died on December twenty-sixth of the year thirty-four, whereas the conversion of St. Paul took place on January twenty-fifth of the year thirty-six, which was also five months after St. James departed on his missionary journey, as I will say in its place (319).

268. Let us return to our great Queen and Lady of the Angels, who by the knowledge and vision to which I have often referred (179) knew all that was happening to Saul: His first and most unhappy state of mind, his fury against the name of Christ, his sudden casting down and its cause, his conversion, and above all his extraordinary and miraculous elevation to the empyrean heaven and vision of God, besides all the rest which happened to him in Damascus. This knowledge was not only proper and due to Her because She was the Mother of the Lord and of his holy Church, and the instrument of this great wonder, but also because She alone could properly estimate this miracle, even more so than St. Paul and more than the whole Mystical Body of the Church, for it was not just that such an unprecedented blessing and such a prodigious work of the Omnipotent remain without recognition and gratitude among mortals. This gratitude most holy Mary rendered in all plenitude, and She was the first who celebrated the solemnity of this new miracle with the acknowledgment due to it from the whole human race. The holy Mother invited all her holy Angels and many others from heaven, who forming into alternate choirs sang with Her canticles of praise in exaltation of the power, wisdom, and liberal mercy of the Almighty toward St. Paul, and others on the merits of her most holy Son in virtue of which this conversion, so full of prodigies and miracles, had been wrought. By this thanksgiving and fidelity of most holy Mary the Most High (according to our way of understanding such things) as it were compensated Himself for having so highly favored the Church in this conversion of St. Paul.

269. But let us not pass over in silence the reflections of the new Apostle concerning what the most kind Mother might think of him now and must have thought of him as such an enemy and persecutor of her most holy Son and his disciples, intent on the destruction of the Church. The loving conjectures of St. Paul in this matter arose not so much from ignorance as from the humility and veneration with which his soul esteemed the Mother of Jesus, though he did not know that great Lady was cognizant of all that had happened in connection with him. Although from this newly acquired knowledge of heavenly things in God he had recognized Her as his most kind Helper in his conversion and salvation, yet the wickedness of his past life abashed, humiliated, and somewhat frightened him, as one unworthy of the favor of such a Mother, whose Son he had persecuted so furiously and blindly. It seemed to him for the pardoning of such grave sins an infinite mercy was necessary, and the Mother was a mere creature; yet on the other hand he was encouraged by the thought that She, in imitation of her Son, had pardoned his executioners. The disciples having told him how kind and sweet She was with sinners and the needy, he was then inflamed with the ardent desire of seeing Her, and he resolved in his mind to throw himself at her feet and kiss the ground whereon She walked. But immediately he was again overcome by shame at the thought of appearing before Her, who was the true Mother of

* cf. *Coronation* 198 [Ed.]

Jesus, still in mortal flesh and so deeply wronged by his conduct. He considered whether he should ask Her to punish him, because that would be some sort of satisfaction; yet again this vengeance seemed foreign to her gentleness, since She had obtained for him through her prayers such immense mercy.

270. Amid these and other disquieting thoughts the Lord permitted St. Paul to suffer some sorrowful yet sweet pains, and at last he said to himself: "Be encouraged, vile and sinful man, for without a doubt She who has prayed for thee shall receive and pardon thee since She is the true Mother of Him who died for thy remedy, and She shall act as the Mother of such a Son since both are all mercy and clemency and shall not despise the contrite and humble heart" (Ps. 50:19). The fears and doubts of St. Paul were not hidden from the heavenly Mother since She knew all through her exalted science. She also knew the Apostle would not find an occasion to see Her for a long time. Moved by her maternal love and compassion She would not permit this consolation to be postponed to such a distant period; therefore, in order to bring it to him from Jerusalem, She called one of her Angels and said to him: "Heavenly spirit and minister of my Son and Lord, I am moved to compassion at the sorrow and trouble which Paul has in his humble heart. I beseech thee, my Angel, go immediately to Damascus and comfort and console him in his fears. Congratulate him on his happy lot and remind him of the gratitude he owes eternally to the clemency by which my Son and Lord has drawn him to his friendship and grace, choosing him as his Apostle. Tell him that never has such mercy been shown to any man as God has manifested in him. And tell him that on my part I shall help him in all his labors as a Mother, and serve him as the handmaid of all the Apostles and ministers who preach the holy Name and doctrine of my Son. Give him my blessing in my name, and tell him that it is sent in the name of Him who condescended to take flesh in my womb and be nursed at my breast."

271. Obediently the holy Angel punctually fulfilled the commission of his Queen, hastening to the presence of St. Paul, who had remained in continual prayer; this happened on the day after his Baptism and the fourth of his conversion. The Angel manifested himself in human form, wonderfully beautiful and resplendent, and fulfilled all most holy Mary had ordered. St. Paul listened to his message with incomparable humility, reverence, and joy of spirit, and thus replied to the Angel: "Sovereign minister of the omnipotent and eternal God, I, the most vile of men, beseech thee, most sweet and heavenly spirit, since thou knowest my debt and the condescension of the infinite mercy of God by which he has manifested his riches in me, give Him thanks and worthy praise, since without my merit He has marked me with the divine character and light of his children. As I drifted farther away from his immense goodness, He pursued me; when I was fleeing from Him, He came forth to meet me; when I blindly delivered myself over to death, He gave me life; when I persecuted Him as an enemy, He raised me to his grace and friendship, recompensing the greatest injuries with the greatest benefits. No one ever rendered himself so odious and detestable as I (I Tim. 1:13), yet no one was so generously pardoned and favored. He snatched me from the mouth of the lion* so I could be one of the sheep of his flock. Thou art a witness of it all, my master; help me to be eternally grateful. And I beseech thee, tell the Mother of Mercy and my Lady this her unworthy slave lies prostrate at her feet, adoring the ground on which they tread, and with a contrite heart beseeching Her to pardon him for having sought with such temerity to destroy the Name and honor of her Son and true God. Beseech Her to forget my offense and deal with this blasphemous sinner as a Mother who remaining ever Virgin conceived, brought forth, and nourished the Lord himself, who gave Her being and chose Her for

* cf. Ps. 21:22; *Offertory* of the Requiem Mass [Ed.]

this purpose from among all creatures. I am deserving of chastisement and vengeance for such errors, and I am prepared to receive it; yet I sense in Her the clemency of her merciful eyes, and I shall not cast aside her grace and protection. May She receive me as a child of the Church which She loves so much, so for its increase and defense I can sacrifice my desires and my blood, and in all things I shall obey the will of Her whom I recognize as my Remediatrix and the Mother of Grace."

272. The holy Angel returned with this answer to the presence of most holy Mary, and though in her wisdom She well knew it he repeated it to Her. She heard it with special joy and again gave thanks and praise to the Most High for the works of his divine right hand in the new Apostle St. Paul, and for the benefits which would result therefrom to his holy Church and the faithful. Regarding the confusion and rout of the demons at the conversion of St. Paul, and many other secrets made known to me concerning the malice of the dragon, I shall speak as far as possible in the next chapter.

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

273. My daughter, none of the faithful should be ignorant of the fact that the Most High could have drawn and converted St. Paul without resorting to such miracles of his infinite power; yet He made use of them in order to show men how much his goodness is inclined to pardon them and raise them to his friendship and grace, and to teach them by the example of this great Apostle how they on their part must cooperate and respond to his calls. The Lord awakens and calls many by the power of his inspirations and helps, and many do respond and justify themselves through the Sacraments of the Church. Yet not all persevere in their justification, and fewer are they who go on to travel the path of perfection; after beginning in the spirit they are resolved to finish in the flesh. The cause why they do not persevere in grace, and return once again to fall into their sins, is their not imitating the spirit of St. Paul at his conversion when he exclaimed (Acts 9:6): "Lord, what dost Thou desire to do with me, and what shall I do for Thee?" Some may pronounce this with their lips, yet it is not from their whole heart, and they always reserve some love of themselves, of honor, of wealth, of sensual pleasure, of delight, and of the occasion of sin, in which they soon stumble and fall again.

274. But the Apostle was a true and living example of one converted by the light of grace, not only because he passed from such an extreme and singular state of sins into another of admirable grace and favors, but also because he willfully cooperated with his vocation, completely abandoning his evil state and his own desires and giving himself up entirely to the divine will and its disposition. This total abnegation of self and surrender to the will of God is contained in those words: "Lord, what dost Thou desire to do with me?" In this consisted, as far as depended upon him, his entire remedy. Since he pronounced them with all the sincerity of a contrite and humbled heart, he renounced his own will and delivered himself over to the will of the Lord, resolving from that moment forward to permit none of his faculties of mind or sense to serve the animal or sensual life into which he had strayed. He delivered himself to the obedience of the Most High in whatever manner or direction would become known to him as being the divine will, ready to execute it without delay or questioning, beginning to fulfill this resolve by immediately entering the city by the command of the Lord and rendering obedience to the disciple Ananias in whatever he ordained. Since the Most High searches the secrets of the human heart (Jer. 17:10), He saw the sincerity with which Paul corresponded to his vocation and yielded

to his divine will and disposition. He not only received him with great pleasure but multiplied in him such graces, gifts, and miraculous favors which even Paul would not have received or ever have merited without this entire submission to the desire of the Lord by which he disposed himself to receive them.

275. In conformity with these truths, my daughter, do thou execute with all plenitude that which I have many times commanded and exhorted thee. Forget and flee from all creatures, leaving behind the visible, apparent and deceitful. Repeat very often, and more with the heart than with the lips, those words of St. Paul: "Lord, what dost Thou desire to do with me?" For as soon as thou dost desire or permit any action or movement by thy will, it shall not be true thou desirest only and entirely the will of the Lord. The instrument has no motion or action except that imparted to it by the artisan, and if it had its own will it would be able to resist and act contrary to the will of the one using it. The same happens between God and the soul, for if it has any desire of its own without waiting for God to actuate it, it will conflict with the pleasure of the Lord. Since He keeps inviolate the privileges of its liberty which He gave it, He will permit it to fall into error since the soul desires it and does not consent to be governed by its Maker.

276. And since it is not proper for the doings of creatures in this mortal life to be miraculously governed by the divine power, and so men could not claim they were misled or deceived, God has placed a law into their hearts, and also in his holy Church, in order for them to know the divine will and regulate their conduct in the fulfillment of it. In addition He places superiors and ministers in his Church, that by hearing and obeying them as representing the Lord himself who assist them men would obey the Lord in them (Lk. 10:16); thus souls would have this security. All this, my dearest, thou dost possess in abundance, and hence thou must not permit any movement, conversation, desire thought, or execute thy own will in anything without obedience to the direction of him who has charge of thy soul, for the Lord sends him to thee just as He sent his disciple Ananias to Paul. Above all this thou hast an even more strict obligation to this obedience because the Most High has looked upon thee with special love and grace. He desires to use thee as an instrument in his hands and assist thee, govern thee, and move thee Himself, through me, and through his holy angels, and all this He does continually with fidelity and attention as thou knowest. Consider then how much reason thou hast to die to thy own desires and live only for the will of God, which alone should give life to all thy actions and operations. Therefore detain thy scrutiny, and remember that even if thy understanding was a summary of the wisdom of the most learned, the counsel of the most prudent, and the natural intelligence of the angels, thou couldst with all this know how to execute his will far less perfectly than by resigning thyself and leaving all to his divine pleasure. He alone knows what is suitable for thee and seeks it with an eternal love; He chose thy ways and governs thee in them. Permit thyself to be guided by his divine light without wasting time mulling over what thou must do, for in this is the danger of erring, and in my doctrine lies all security and success. Write it in thy heart and fulfill it with all thy strength so thou mayest merit my intercession, and by it the Most High shall raise thee to Himself.