

CHAPTER XI

Declaring Something of the Prudence with which Most Holy Mary Governed the New Faithful; what She Did for St. Stephen during His Life and at His Death; and Other Events.

179. For the ministry of Mother and Teacher of the holy Church which the Lord had conferred upon most holy Mary, She was consequently given knowledge and light proportionate to such an exalted office, since She was to know all the members of that Mystical Body, whose spiritual government was her concern, and to each one She was to apply the doctrine and teaching conformable to his level, condition and necessity. This blessing our Queen received with consummate fullness and abundance of wisdom and divine science as is readily apparent in the entire discourse I am writing. She knew all the faithful who joined the Church and was informed of their natural inclinations, the degree of virtue and grace they possessed, the merit of their works, their beginning and end. She was ignorant of nothing pertaining to the Church, except sometimes when the Lord concealed from Her some affair which afterwards was made known to Her at its conclusion. All this knowledge was not sterile or barren, but corresponded with proportionate participation in the charity of her most holy Son by which She loved all as She came to see and know them. Since She at the same time also knew the sacrament of the divine will, with all this wisdom She dispensed the affections of interior charity according to weight and measure, giving neither more to that which merited less, nor less to that which merited greater love and estimation, the failure of which is a defect which we ignorant children of Adam very commonly incur, even in what seems to us justified.

180. But the Mother of well-ordered love and knowledge did not pervert the order of distributive justice (Cant. 2:4) regarding her interior affections; rather She dispensed them by the light of the Lamb who enlightened and governed Her so her interior love would be given to each according to his merits, neither more nor less, though in this She was a most clement and loving Mother towards all, without tepidity, stinginess or forgetfulness. But in her exterior manifestations of this love She governed Herself according to other rules of highest prudence, carefully avoiding special predilections and the slightest grounds for envy or emulation in her dealings with others, for these are very apt to disrupt communities and families where many eyes are always watching the public proceedings. It is a common and natural passion in men to seek estimation and distinction, especially in the eyes of those who are powerful, and there is scarcely anyone who does not presume on possessing equal merits with all the rest and deserving equal or even greater favors. This kind of emulation is not lacking even among those who are in the highest position or have attained high virtue such as occurred in the Apostolic College, in which because of some distinction shown to one the question of precedence and dignity was immediately raised and broached before the Lord (Mt. 18:1).

181. In order to prevent and avoid these grudges the great Queen was most solicitous to show unbiased and uniform favor to all the members of the Church in public. This conduct was not only worthy of such a Teacher but most necessary in the beginnings of her governing, for the principles upon which her behavior was founded were to be well established for the guidance of prelates in the future government of the Church. Moreover in those happy beginnings all the Apostles and disciples, and others of the faithful, excelled in the working of miracles and in divine gifts, while in the latter times many were to signalize themselves in holy science and learning. It was proper to teach all that neither because of great gifts, nor for lesser ones, should anyone exalt himself in vain presumption, or deem himself worthy of great honors, or of being

avored more highly, especially by God or his most holy Mother, as far as outward appearances are concerned. Let the just be satisfied with being loved by the Lord and favored by his friendship, and whoever is not satisfied with this will not be benefited by exterior honor and esteem.

182. But the great Queen did not because of this reserve fail in the veneration and honor which in justice was due to each one of the Apostles and faithful because of the dignity or ministry each one had, for just as She taught moderation in all that was to be rendered to each one freely and gratuitously, so She also was an example in all that was due under obligation to each one. Our admirable Queen was so prudent in all her dealings that not one of the faithful ever left Her dissatisfied, nor could anyone with any show of reason, even if it were only apparent, deny Her esteem and respect; all of them loved and blessed Her, and were filled with joy and gratitude for her loving and maternal kindness. No one ever suspected Her of forsaking him in his necessity or denying him her consolation; no one perceived himself to be less esteemed, or that She favored or loved some more than others, nor did She give anyone an occasion of making a comparison in this regard. In addition She did not desire to assign on her own responsibility any of the offices or dignities which were to be filled among the faithful, nor intercede for anyone in this matter. She left all to the opinion and votes of the Apostles, the success of which She obtained from the Lord by her secret prayers.

183. She was led also to this wise disposition of her actions by her most profound humility. In this She was an example to all, since they knew She was the Mother of Wisdom who knew all things and could not err in her conduct. She desired to leave this shining example in the Church so no one might presume on his own knowledge, prudence or virtue,* especially in serious matters, but so all could understand that true insight is conditioned by humility and good counsel, and in all matters that are not to be decided merely by private judgment, such private judgment implies presumption. She likewise took into consideration that to intercede and favor others in temporal matters has the appearance of superiority, and still more does it expose one to desire thankful returns from those so favored. All these inequalities and defects in the practice of virtue were far removed from the supreme sanctity of our heavenly Queen, and hence She taught us by her living example the rules of our exterior conduct which prevent as well the loss of merit as the hindrance of the greatest perfection. Thus in her modesty She never refused to give counsel to the Apostles when they so frequently asked Her for direction in the exercise of their office and in their undertakings, and the same line of conduct She observed with the other disciples and faithful of the Church, because She conducted Herself in all things according to the plenitude of wisdom and charity.

184. Among the Saints who were especially fortunate in meriting the greater love of the Queen of heaven was St. Stephen, who belonged to the seventy-two disciples; for from the very beginning of his following of Christ our Savior She looked upon him with special love, placing him first or among the first in her estimation. She immediately saw this Saint was chosen by the Master of life for the defense of his honor and his holy Name, and that he was to give up his life for Him; moreover, this courageous Saint was of a sweet and peaceful disposition, and he was rendered much more amiable and docile to all sanctity by the workings of grace. Such dispositions made him very pleasing to the sweetest Mother, and whenever She found any persons naturally of a peaceful and meek character She was accustomed to say they resembled her divine Son. Because of this and the many heroic virtues of St. Stephen She loved him

* cf. Rom. 12:16 [Ed.]

tenderly, procured for him many blessings, and thanked the Lord for having created, called and chosen him for the firstfruits of his martyrs. In consideration of his coming martyrdom, revealed to Her by her divine Son, her Heart was filled with additional affection for this great Saint.

185. The happy Saint corresponded in most faithful attention and deepest reverence with the benefits conferred upon him by Christ our Savior and his heavenly Mother, for he was not only peaceful but humble of heart, and those who are so disposed in truth are grateful for all benefits, even though they may not be so great as those conferred on St. Stephen. He always thought most highly of the Mother of Mercy, and solicited her grace with this appreciation and most fervent devotion. He questioned Her regarding many mysterious matters, for he was very wise, full of the Holy Ghost and of faith as St. Luke says (Acts 6:5). The great Lady answered all his inquiries, encouraging and exhorting him to work zealously for the honor of Christ. In order to confirm him more in his strong faith, most holy Mary forewarned him of his coming martyrdom and said: "Thou, Stephen, shall be the firstborn of the martyrs engendered by my most holy Son and Lord by the example of his death. Thou shalt follow his footsteps like a valiant disciple his master and a courageous soldier his captain, and at the head of the militia of the Martyrs thou shalt carry the banner of the Cross. For this battle it is proper for thee to arm thyself with fortitude by the shield of faith, and trust that the power of the Most High shall assist thee in thy conflict."

186. This warning of the Queen of the Angels inflamed the heart of St. Stephen with the desire of martyrdom. As recorded in the Acts of the Apostles (6:8) he was *full of grace and fortitude* and *did great wonders and signs* in Jerusalem. After the Apostles St. Peter and St. John no one would engage in disputes with the Jews except for him. His wisdom and spirit they could not resist because he preached to them with an intrepid heart, convicting and reproving them,* signaling himself in this exertion before and above the other disciples (Ib. 9). All this St. Stephen did with the burning desire of attaining the martyrdom of which he had been assured by the great Lady. As if another might gain this crown, he offered himself before all others to engage in the disputes with the rabbis and teachers of the law of Moses, so eager was he to defend the honor of Christ, for whom he knew he would lay down his life. The infernal dragon, gradually becoming observant of the desire of St. Stephen, directed his malignant attention toward him and strove to hinder his attainment of public martyrdom in testimony of the faith of Christ. In order to destroy him he incited the most incredulous of the Jews to kill St. Stephen in secret. Lucifer was tormented by the virtue and courage he recognized in St. Stephen, fearing he would accomplish great works in life and in death, accrediting the faith and doctrine of his Master. Due to the hatred of the incredulous Jews against the holy disciple the demons easily persuaded them to take away his life in secret.

187. They attempted it often during the short time which intervened between the coming of the Holy Ghost and his martyrdom. But the great Mistress of the world, who knew the malice and intrigues of Lucifer and the Jews, freed St. Stephen from all their snares until the opportune time would arrive for his being stoned to death, of which I shall presently speak. On three occasions the Queen sent one of her Angels to assist St. Stephen by extracting him from a house where his enemies intended to choke him to death. The Angel who brought him out from this danger was invisible to the Jews who sought his life, but not to the Saint, who saw and knew the Angel who carried him to the Cenacle into the presence of his Queen and Lady. At other times She warned him by the same Angel not to go to a certain street or house where his enemies expected to kill

* cf. Jude 22 [Ed.]

him; sometimes the great Mother detained him in the Cenacle because She knew they were stalking him to kill him. They not only awaited some nights for him to leave the Cenacle to murder him on his way to his lodging, but at other houses they plotted the same snares and treachery, since St. Stephen in his ardent zeal helped and consoled many of the needy faithful; not only did he not fear dangers, even mortal ones, but rather desired and sought them. Since he did not know how long the Lord would delay this happiness, and saw how many times the Blessed Mother freed him from dangers, he was accustomed to lovingly complain to Her, saying: "My Lady and Protectress, when shall the day and hour arrive in which I shall pay to my God and Master the debt of my life by sacrificing it for the honor and glory of his holy Name?"

188. These complaints uttered by her servant Stephen for the love of Christ were for most holy Mary of incomparable joy, and with maternal and sweet affection She was accustomed to answer: "My son and most faithful servant of the Lord, soon the time determined by his infinite wisdom shall arrive and thy hopes shall not be frustrated. Do thou at present accomplish the rest of thy labors in his holy Church so thou mayest secure the crown reserved in thy name, and render gratitude continually to the Lord who has prepared it for thee." The purity and sanctity of St. Stephen were most noble and of eminent perfection, such that the demons could not approach very near to him, and hence he was much beloved by Christ and his most holy Mother. The Apostles ordained him a deacon. Even before he was martyred his virtues reached a heroic degree, meriting for him the distinction of being the first one after the Passion to receive the palm of martyrdom. I shall add here what was made known to me in explanation of what St. Luke wrote in chapter VI of the Acts of the Apostles.

189. A difference arose among the newly converted in Jerusalem. The Greeks complained of the Hebrew converts that in the daily service and work of relief the widows of the Greeks were not admitted in the same way to office as those of the Jews (Acts 6:1). Both the former as well as the latter were Israelites, though the Jews born in Greece were called Greeks and those born in Palestine Hebrews, and in this distinction was founded the complaint of the Greeks. The daily administration consisted in the distribution of the alms and offerings for the support of the faithful, as has been described in chapter VII (107). As I said, this duty had been assigned to six approved men with the consent of all according to the direction of Mary most holy. But as the number of the faithful increased it became necessary to also appoint some widows of a mature age to help in the same work of providing for the needs of the faithful, especially the women and the sick. These widows were to distribute whatever they received from the six almoners. They were of Hebrew birth, and since the Greek Jews saw that none of theirs were admitted to this office they complained to the Apostles of this lack of confidence in their own widows.

190. In order to resolve this dispute the Apostolic College called together the faithful and spoke to them (Acts 6:2-4): "*It is not reasonable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.* You shall go to them with the doubts and differences which arise regarding the sustenance of the faithful." All approved of this expedient, and without regard to nationality they elected the seven men mentioned by St. Luke. The first and principal one was St. Stephen, whose faith and wisdom were universally known. These seven were superintendents over the six first almoners and over the widows without excluding the Greeks, for they looked to virtue rather than nationality. It was St. Stephen who by his admirable wisdom and sanctity extinguished the resentment of the Greeks and smoothed over

their differences with the Hebrews, so at least during the months in which he lived all again united like children of Christ in sincere charity, without partiality or distinction of persons.

191. Yet despite this occupation St. Stephen did not stop preaching or disputing with the unbelieving Jews. Since these Jews could not murder him in secret, nor overcome his wisdom in public, they vented their mortal hatred in seeking false testimony against him (Ib. 11ff.). They accused him of blasphemy against God and against Moses, of not ceasing to speak against the holy temple and the law, and of asserting that Jesus of Nazareth would destroy the one as well as the other. Since the witnesses loudly proclaimed their slander and the people were being roused by their falsehoods they brought him into the hall where the priests were gathered as the judges of these accusations. The presiding judge first took the deposition of St. Stephen before the court. The Saint took occasion to prove with highest wisdom that Christ was the true Messiah promised to them in the Holy Scriptures, and in conclusion he reprehended them for their unbelief and hardness of heart so strongly they could find no answer, and gnashing their teeth they stopped their ears in order not to be obliged to hear his words (Ib. 7:1ff.).

192. The Queen of heaven took notice of the arrest of St. Stephen, and in order to animate him in her name for the approaching conflict She immediately sent him one of her Angels even before he entered into dispute with the priests. Through the same Angel St. Stephen responded to Her that he went with joy to confess his Master, and with an ardent heart to give his life for the faith as he had always desired. He asked Her Majesty to help him on this occasion as a most merciful Mother and Queen, and that from her retreat She give him her blessing so he could die with it as he desired, since his only sorrow was not being able to ask it in her presence. These last words of St. Stephen moved the maternal bosom of most holy Mary to compassion beyond the love and esteem She had for him, and the great Lady desired to assist him personally at this hour when the Saint was to offer his life for the honor and defense of his God and Redeemer. But the prudent Mother hesitated at the difficulties which would arise if She passed through the streets of Jerusalem at a time of such agitation, and also in finding an opportunity of speaking to St. Stephen.

193. She prostrated Herself in prayer, begging the divine favor for her beloved disciple, and She presented to the Lord her desire of helping him in his last hour. The Most High, who is always attentive to the petitions and desires of his Spouse and Mother, and who also desired to enhance the death of his faithful disciple and servant Stephen, in his clemency sent from heaven a multitude of Angels and commanded them, together with those of her guard, to carry their Queen to the place where the Saint then was, and the mandate of the Lord was immediately executed. The Angels placed Her upon a refulgent cloud and bore Her to the tribunal where the high priest had just finished examining the charges brought against St. Stephen. This vision was hidden from all except the Saint, who saw the great Queen before him supported in the air by the holy Angels in a cloud of heavenly splendor and glory. This extraordinary favor inflamed anew the divine love and the ardent zeal for the honor of God in his defender Stephen. In addition to the new joy which he received by the sight of most holy Mary, it also happened that the splendors of the great Queen as it were shone upon the countenance of St. Stephen, reflecting from it so it gleamed with admirable light and beauty.

194. From this novelty resulted the attention with which the Jews looked upon St. Stephen in that courtroom or tribunal, of which St. Luke speaks in chapter VI of the Acts of the Apostles (v. 15), saying they gazed upon his countenance as if it was that of an angel, for without doubt he seemed to them more than a man. God did not desire to hide that much of the effects of the presence of the great Queen so the perfidious Jews would be so much the more confounded for

not accepting the truth preached in such a miraculous way. They did not know the cause of this supernatural beauty of St. Stephen since they were unworthy to know it, nor was it a proper occasion to make it known, and hence for this reason it was not related by St. Luke. Most holy Mary spoke to Stephen words of life and wonderful consolation; She assisted him with the blessings of sweetness and asked the eternal Father to fill him anew with the Holy Ghost. All happened according to the prayers of the Queen, and he manifested his invincible courage and wisdom to the princes of the Jews, proving by the irrefutable testimony of all the ancient Scriptures, from the calling of Abraham to the Kings and Prophets, that Christ was their Messiah and Savior.

195. At the end of this discourse, through the intercession of the Queen and as a reward of the unconquered zeal of St. Stephen, the heavens opened and the Savior appeared to him standing at the right hand of the Father, attending upon the Saint in his battle in order to help him in the conflict. St. Stephen raised his eyes and said: "Behold I see the heavens opened and its glory, and in it I see Jesus at the right hand of God himself" (Acts 7:55). But the obdurate Jews considered these words as blasphemy, and they stopped their ears in order not to hear them. Since the punishment of blasphemers according to the law was death by stoning, they passed upon him that sentence. Then they all surrounded him like wolves and dragged him from the city with great haste and noise. At this juncture most holy Mary gave him her benediction, and speaking to him words of encouragement and endearment She left him in charge of her Angels, whom She ordered to accompany him and remain with him until they would present his soul to the Most High. Only one of her Guardian Angels, along with the rest of those who had descended from heaven in order to carry Her to St. Stephen, returned with Her to the Cenacle.

196. From her retirement the great Lady by a special vision saw all that happened in the martyrdom of St. Stephen; how they led him forth from the city with great haste and violence, shouting that he was a blasphemer worthy of death; how Saul was among them, more zealous than the rest, guarding the vestments of those who had taken them off to stone St. Stephen (Ib. 57); and how the shower of stones fell upon the Saint and wounded him, some of them remaining fixed in his head and stained by his blood. Great and tender was the compassion of our Queen at such cruel martyrdom, but still greater was her joy in seeing St. Stephen meeting it so gloriously. The most kind Mother failed him not in her tearful prayers from her oratory. When the invincible Martyr saw himself near to death he prayed: *Lord, receive my spirit*. Then, on his knees, he exclaimed with a loud voice: *Lord, lay not this sin to their charge* (Ib. 58-9). In these prayers he was supported by those of most holy Mary, who was filled with incredible joy in seeing the faithful disciple imitate so closely his divine Master by praying for his enemies and persecutors and commending his spirit into the hands of his Creator and Redeemer.

197. St. Stephen expired covered with wounds from the shower of stones thrown by the Jews, while they became still more hardened. Immediately the Angels of the Queen bore his most pure soul to the presence of God in order to be crowned with eternal honor and glory. Christ our Savior received him with those words of the Gospel: "*Friend, go up higher* (Lk. 14:10); come to Me, faithful servant, for since thou hast been faithful in small things and for a short time, I shall reward thee with abundance (Mt. 25:21), and I shall confess thee before my Father as my faithful servant and friend, since thou hast confessed Me before men" (Mt. 10:32). All the Angels, Patriarchs, Prophets, and all the Saints were filled with special accidental joy on that day and welcomed the invincible Martyr as the firstfruits of the Passion of the Lord and as the captain of all those who after his death would follow him by martyrdom. That most happy soul was placed very high in glory and close to the most sacred humanity of Christ our Savior. The Blessed

Mother participated in this joy through a vision granted to Her, and in praise of the Most High She composed hymns and canticles with her Angels. Those who returned after leaving St. Stephen in heaven gave thanks to Her for the favors She had worked for the Saint in securing the eternal happiness he now enjoyed.

198. St. Stephen died about nine months after the Passion and Death of Christ our Redeemer, on the twenty-sixth of December, the same date on which the Church celebrates his feast. On that day he had completed his thirty-fourth year, which was also the thirty-fourth year of the birth of the Savior, with the addition of one day into the thirty-fifth. Thus St. Stephen was born one day after the Nativity of the Savior, and lived only nine months longer, the interval between the death of Christ and his own. The birth and death of St. Stephen happened on the same day of the year, as was clearly shown to me. The prayer of Mary most holy and of St. Stephen merited the conversion of Saul, as we will see later on (263). In order for this conversion to be so much the more glorious the Lord permitted Saul from that day on to take it upon himself to persecute and destroy the Church, for he began to signalize himself above all other Jews in the persecution which the wrath of the Jews, highly inflamed by the death of St. Stephen, now began to stir up against the new believers. The disciples secured the body of the invincible Martyr and buried it with great mourning (Acts 8:2) because they had now lost such a wise and strong defender of the law of grace. I have gone into more detail regarding St. Stephen because I have come to know the distinguished sanctity of this Protomartyr, and because he was so devoted to and favored by most holy Mary.

INSTRUCTION WHICH THE GREAT QUEEN OF THE ANGELS GAVE ME.

199. My daughter, the divine mysteries, when they are presented and explained to such men as are accustomed only to the perception of earthly and sensible things, appear to be insignificant, especially if at the same time their souls are not purified from sin and cleared of the darkness of guilt; for the human faculties, besides being of limited capacity, are hindered by their attention to and affection for what is apparent, draw away from the truth, and being accustomed to obscurity are dazzled by the light. For this cause earthly and animal men conceive such distorted and low ideas of the wonderful works of the Most High (I Cor. 2:14), and also what I have done and am doing every day for them. They tread upon pearls,* and do not distinguish the bread of the children from the gross food of irrational brutes.† All that is heavenly and divine seems to them boring because they fail to perceive it by the savor of the senses, and thus they become incapable of attending to the high things and of profiting from the science of life and the bread of understanding enclosed therein.

200. But the Most High, my dearest, has desired to preserve thee from this danger and has given thee knowledge and light, enhancing thy senses and faculties so being made capable and enlivened by the force of divine grace thou mayest perceive and distinguish without error the mysteries and sacraments which I manifest to thee. Although I have many times told thee that in this mortal life thou shalt never penetrate or value them in their entirety, yet thou canst and must according to thy powers show thy appreciation of them by learning and imitating my works. From the variety and bitterness of my pains and trials with which my whole life was interwoven, even after I returned from the right hand of my Son in heaven to the earth, thou shalt understand

* cf. Mt. 7:6 [Ed.]

† cf. Mt. 15:26 [Ed.]

that thy own life, in order to follow me as a Mother, must be of the same condition if thou dost desire to be my disciple. In the prudent and equal humility with which I governed the Apostles and all the faithful without partiality or singularity thou hast an example of how thou must proceed in the government of thy subjects with meekness, modesty, humble strictness, and especially without acceptance of persons or by making a distinction in favor of any person in those things which can and ought to be common to all. This facilitates true charity and humility in those who govern, for if they show these virtues they will not be so peremptory in their commands, nor so presumptuous in their own opinions, nor will they pervert the order of justice with so much damage as is suffered today throughout Christianity. Pride, vanity, self-interest, self-love, and nepotism have infected nearly all the proceedings and works of government, and hence error is everywhere and has filled the republics with injustice and appalling confusion.

201. In the most ardent zeal which I had for the honor of my Son and true God, and for the preaching and defense of his holy Name; in the joy I received in seeing his divine will executed and the increase of souls in the Church gaining the fruit of his Passion and Death; in the favors which I procured for the glorious martyr Stephen, because he was the first who when faced with that trial offered his life for Christ; in all this, my daughter, thou shalt find great motives for praising the Most High in his divine works, so worthy of veneration and glory, for imitating me, and for praising his immense goodness for the wisdom He gave to me in order to work in all things with the plenitude of sanctity for his pleasure and approbation.