

CHAPTER II

The Glorious Martyrdom of St. James; He is Assisted in this by Most Holy Mary, and She Takes his Soul to Heaven; His Body is Brought to Spain; the Imprisonment of St. Peter, and his Liberation from Prison; the Secrets Connected with These Events.

392. Our great Apostle St. James came to Jerusalem at a time when that whole city was very much incensed against the disciples and followers of Christ our Lord. This new indignation had been secretly roused by the demons, instilling more of their poisonous breath into the hearts of the perfidious* Jews, inflaming them with zeal for their law and emulation against the new evangelical law on the occasion of the preaching of St. Paul, who though he remained not more than fifteen days in Jerusalem, nevertheless in that short time by the divine power had converted many and excited the wonder and admiration of all the people. And though the unbelieving Jews felt somewhat relieved by the news he had left Jerusalem, yet they were again thrown into consternation by the speedy arrival of St. James, who showed no less zeal and heavenly wisdom in proclaiming the name of Christ our Redeemer. Lucifer, who was not ignorant of his arrival, urged and augmented the indignation of the chief priests, scribes and priests so the new preacher might serve his desire of injecting more venom into those he desired to stir up and disturb. St. James began to preach most fervently the name of the Crucified and his mysterious Death and Resurrection. In the first few days he converted to the faith some of the Jews, among whom were especially Hermogenes and Philetus, both of them magicians and sorcerers who had a pact with the demon. Hermogenes was deeply versed in magic and Philetus was his disciple. The Jews wanted to engage the services of these two in order either to overcome St. James in dispute, or if that was impossible to take away his life by their magic arts.

393. This wickedness the demons plotted to execute by means of the Jews as instruments of their iniquity, for the demons themselves could not come near St. James, terrified of the divine grace which they felt in him. The two magicians arriving at the dispute Philetus entered first, arguing with St. James so if he could not conclude with victory Hermogenes, as the more skillful master in the magic art, could enter the combat. Philetus brought forth his sophistical and false arguments, but the holy Apostle spoke with such wisdom and force that all his sophisms yielded as the darkness before the light. Philetus was overcome and converted to the truth of Christ, becoming from that time on a defender of the Apostle and his doctrine. But fearing the diabolical arts of his master Hermogenes he sought the protection of St. James. The holy Apostle gave him a piece of cloth or linen which he had received from most holy Mary, and with this relic Philetus protected himself against the power of Hermogenes for some days until the latter himself entered the dispute.

394. Although Hermogenes feared St. James he could not evade the meeting because he had pledged himself to the Jews to enter the dispute and convince him; hence he tried to enforce his errors by more cogent arguments than his disciple. Yet all he could do was unavailing against the heavenly force and wisdom of the Apostle, which was like an impetuous torrent. He brought Hermogenes to silence and obliged him to confess his belief in the mysteries of the faith of Christ just as he had done with Philetus; both of them accepted the faith and doctrine preached by the Apostle. The demons were irritated against Hermogenes, and by the power they had

* cf. Liturgy of Good Friday, Collect *pro perfidis Judaeis* [Ed.]

acquired over him they began to abuse him because of his conversion. Since he learned how Philetus had defended himself by the relic obtained from the Apostle, he sought a like favor against his enemies. St. James gave him the scarf he had used in his travels, and with it Hermogenes put to flight the demons and made them powerless to approach or afflict him further.

395. These conversions and others made by St. James in Jerusalem were hastened by the tearful sighs and prayers of the great Queen in her retreat at Ephesus, where as I have often said (80, 158, etc.) She knew by vision all that was done by the Apostles and the other faithful of the Church, and particularly what happened with the beloved Apostle James for whom She was especially solicitous as being so near his martyrdom. Hermogenes and Philetus persevered for some time in the faith of Christ, but afterwards they fell away and lost it in Asia as is evident from the Second Epistle to Timothy (1:15), where St. Paul says that Phigellus (or Philetus) and Hermogenes had left him. Although the seed of the faith had sprung up in the hearts of these men it took no sufficient root to resist the temptations of the demon,* whom they had served and familiarly entertained for such a long time. The evil and perverse inclinations of their vices still remained and again prevailed, withdrawing them from the faith they had accepted.

396. When the Jews saw their vain confidence frustrated by the persuasion and conversion of Philetus and Hermogenes they were filled with new anger against the Apostle St. James, and they determined to put an end to his life. For this purpose they bribed Democritus and Lysias, centurions of the Roman militia, to furnish them with soldiers for the arrest of the Apostle. In order to hide their treachery they were to raise a feigned quarrel or disturbance on a certain day during his preaching and thus get him within their power. The execution of this wicked plot was left to Abiathar, the high priest of that year, and to Josias, a scribe of the same spirit as the high priest. They executed their scheme as they had planned it, for while the Saint was preaching to the people about the mystery of the Redemption, proving it to them with admirable wisdom from the testimonies of the ancient writings and moving his audience to tears of compunction, the priest and the scribe were roused to diabolical fury. Giving the signal to the Roman soldiers the priest sent Josias to throw a rope around the neck of St. James and he fell upon him, proclaiming him a disturber of the people and the author of a new religion in opposition to the Roman Empire.

397. Then Democritus and Lysias rushed up with their soldiers and brought the Apostle bound to Herod, the son of Archelaus, who also had been prepared interiorly by the cunning and malice of Lucifer and exteriorly by the malice and hatred of the Jews. Thus doubly incited Herod began against the disciples of the Lord, whom he abhorred, the persecution mentioned by St. Luke in chapter XII of the Acts of the Apostles (v. 1ff.), and sent his soldiers to afflict and imprison them. He instantly commanded St. James to be beheaded as the Jews had asked. Incredible was the joy of the holy Apostle at being seized and bound like his Master, and at seeing himself conducted to the place where he was to pass from this mortal life to eternal life through martyrdom as he had been informed by the Queen of heaven (385). He rendered most humble gratitude for this benefit and publicly reiterated the open profession of his faith in Christ our Lord. Remembering the petition he had made in Ephesus that She be present at his death (384), he called upon Her from his inmost soul.

398. Most holy Mary from her oratory heard these prayers of the beloved Apostle and her cousin, for She was attentive to all that happened to him, and She helped and favored him with

* cf. Lk. 8:12-13 [Ed.]

her own efficacious petitions. While She prayed She saw a great multitude of Angels and supreme spirits from all the hierarchies descending from heaven, part of them surrounding the Apostle in Jerusalem as he was led to the place of execution, while numerous others approached their Queen at Ephesus, and one of the highest said to Her: “Empress of the heights and our Lady, the most high God and Lord of armies* bids you to immediately go to Jerusalem to console his great servant James, assist him in his death, and accommodate all his holy and pious desires.” This favor most holy Mary received with great joy and gratitude, and She praised the Most High for the protection granted to those who trust in his mercy and put their lives in his hands. Meanwhile the Apostle was led to his martyrdom, and on the way there he wrought many miracles for the all the sick and ailing, and for some possessed by the devil, and all of them left him healthy and freed from the demons. Since the word had been spread that Herod commanded him to be beheaded, many of the needy came seeking their remedy before being deprived of their common consolation.

399. At the same time the holy Angels placed their great Queen and Lady upon a most refulgent throne (as I have related on other occasions [165, 193, 325, 349]) and carried Her to Jerusalem to the place where St. James had been taken to be executed. The holy Apostle fell upon his knees in order to offer his life to the Most High in sacrifice, and when he raised his eyes toward heaven he saw in the air in his presence the Queen of heaven Herself, whom he had been invoking in his heart. He beheld Her clothed in divine splendors and great beauty, surrounded by the multitude of Angels who attended upon Her. By this heavenly spectacle James was entirely inflamed in the ardors of new joy and charity, the impetus of which moved his entire heart and faculties. He desired to cry out acclaiming most holy Mary as the Mother of God himself and the Mistress of all creation, but one of the sovereign spirits restrained him in this fervent desire and said: “James, servant of our Creator, keep within thy own bosom these precious affections and do not manifest to the Jews the presence and favor of our Queen, since they are neither worthy nor capable of understanding it, and would extend their hatred to Her whom thou dost revere.”† Thus advised the Apostle restrained himself, and moving his lips in silence he spoke to the heavenly Queen as follows:

400. “Mother of my Lord Jesus Christ, my Lady and Protectress, Thou consolation of the afflicted and refuge of the needy, give me, O Lady, thy much desired blessing in this hour. Offer for me to thy Son and Redeemer of the world the sacrifice of my life, since I am burning with desire to be a holocaust for the glory of his holy Name. Today let thy most pure and innocent hands be the altar of my sacrifice, so it may be received and acceptable to Him who offered his life for me on the Holy Cross. Into thy hands, and through them into the hands of my Creator, I commend my spirit.” Having said these words, and keeping his eyes raised to Mary most holy, who spoke to his heart, the holy Apostle was beheaded by the executioner. The great Lady and Queen of the world (O wonderful condescension!) received the soul of the Apostle She loved so much, and placing him at her side on the throne ascended with him to the empyrean heaven and presented him to her divine Son. As most holy Mary entered the heavenly court with this offering She caused new joy and accidental glory to all the heavenly inhabitants and was received with songs of praise. The Most High received the soul of James and placed him in eminent glory among the princes of his people. Most holy Mary, prostrate before the throne of the Almighty, composed a canticle of praise and thanksgiving for the martyrdom and triumph of

* cf. Ps. 45:8 [Ed.]

† cf. Mt. 7:6 [Ed.]

the first Apostle martyred. On this occasion the great Lady did not see the Divinity by intuitive vision but by an abstractive one such as I have described before; yet the blessed Trinity filled Her with new blessings and favors for Herself and for the holy Church, for which She had made great petitions. All the saints likewise blessed Her, and then the holy Angels brought Her back to her oratory in Ephesus where during this time an Angel had impersonated Her. Upon arriving the heavenly Mother of virtues prostrated Herself as was her custom in order to give thanks to the Most High for all that had happened.

401. The disciples of St. James that night recovered his sacred body and secretly brought it to the port of Jaffa, where by divine disposition they embarked with it for Galicia in Spain. The heavenly Lady sent an Angel to guide and accompany them to the port where according to the divine will they were to disembark. Although they did not see the Angel they felt his protection during the whole voyage, and often in a miraculous manner. Thus Spain, just as it owed its first instruction in the faith so deeply rooted in the hearts of its people to the protection lavished by most holy Mary upon the Apostle, now also owes to Her the possession of his sacred body for its consolation and defense. St. James died in the year forty-one of our Lord, on the twenty-fifth of March, five years and seven months after he set out to preach in Spain.* According to this count and that which I gave above (198, 376) the martyrdom of St. James happened seven full years after the death of our Christ our Savior.

402. That his martyrdom was at the end of March is clear from chapter XII of the Acts of the Apostles (v. 3), where St. Luke says because of the rejoicings of the Jews at the death of St. James Herod imprisoned also St. Peter with the intention of beheading him after the feast of the Pasch (Ib. 4), which was that of the paschal lamb or of unleavened bread, and the Jews celebrated this feast on the fourteenth of the moon of March. From this passage it appears the imprisonment of St. Peter was during this Pasch or very near it, and the death of St. James had preceded it by a few days, since the fourteenth of the moon of March in the year forty-one, according to our present computation of the years and months, occurred in the last days of March. Accordingly the death of St. James happened on the twenty-fifth, before the fourteenth of the moon, and soon thereafter took place the imprisonment of St. Peter and the Pasch of the Jews. The holy Church does not celebrate the feast of St. James on the day of his death because it falls on the same day as the Incarnation, and ordinarily also in the time of the Passion of the Lord. It was therefore transferred to the twenty-fifth of July, which is the day of the translation of the body of the holy Apostle to Spain.

403. The death of St. James and the haste of Herod in inflicting it greatly increased the most impious cruelty of the Jews, for in the savage brutality of the wicked king they saw a valuable means of pursuing their vengeance against the followers of Christ our Lord. Lucifer and his demons were of like opinion; they by their suggestions, and the Jews by their insistent flatteries, persuaded him to seize St. Peter, as indeed he did as a favor to the Jews, whom he desired to satisfy for his temporal ends. The demons greatly feared the Vicar of Christ due to the power against them they felt in him, and hence they secretly sought to hasten his imprisonment. St. Peter, bound with many chains, lay in the dungeon awaiting his execution after the Pasch (Acts 12:4). Although the undaunted heart of the Apostle was as free from anxiety or solicitude as if he had been at liberty, yet the whole body of the Church of Jerusalem was in consternation, and all of the disciples and faithful were greatly afflicted at the news that Herod was to execute him without delay. In their affliction they multiplied their prayers and petitions to the Lord for the

* cf. *Coronation* 319 [Ed.]

preservation of St. Peter (Ib. 5), whose death threatened the whole Church with great havoc and tribulation. They invoked also the protection and powerful intercession of most holy Mary, from whom they all expected deliverance.

404. The dangerous crisis impending over the Church was not unknown to the heavenly Mother, for though She was in Ephesus her most merciful eyes beheld from there all that passed in Jerusalem by her most clear vision of all things. She likewise increased her ardent requests, her sighs, prostrations, and bloody tears, supplicating the Lord for the liberation of St. Peter and the protection of the holy Church. This prayer of most holy Mary penetrated the heavens and wounded the Heart of her Son Jesus our Savior. In response the Lord descended in person to her oratory, where She was lying prostrate with her virginal face upon the ground mingling with the dust. The sovereign King entered and raised Her lovingly from the ground, saying: "My Mother, moderate thy sorrow and say all for which Thou dost pray, for I shall grant it all, and Thou shalt find grace in my eyes to obtain it."

405. By the presence and endearments of her Son the heavenly Mother was reanimated and filled with glad consolation, for the tribulations of the Church were the sole cause of her martyrdom, and to see St. Peter in prison condemned to death, and the dangers thus threatening the primitive Church, afflicted Her more than can be conceived. She renewed her petition in the presence of Christ our Redeemer and said: "Lord and true God, my Son, Thou knowest the tribulation of thy holy Church, and her clamors sound in thy ears and penetrate to the inmost of my afflicted heart. Thy enemies desire to take away the life of her Pastor, thy Vicar, and if Thou, my Lord, permit it now, they shall scatter thy little flock, and the infernal wolves shall triumph over thy Name as they desire. O my Lord and my God, life of my soul, for whom I live, issue thy sovereign command over the sea and the storm, and then the winds and the waves which batter this little ship shall be calmed.* Defend thy Vicar and confound thy enemies; and if it is for thy glory and according to thy will, turn these tribulations against me so I may suffer for thy faithful children and battle thy enemies, with thy right arm assisting me for the defense of thy Church."

406. Her most holy Son answered: "My Mother, with the virtue and power Thou hast received from Me I desire Thee to act according to thy will. Do or undo all that is proper for my Church; and be forewarned that all the fury of the demons shall be turned against Thee." The most prudent Mother thanked Him for this new favor and offered to fight the battles of the Lord for the children of the Church, saying: "My Lord most high, hope and life of my soul, prepared is the heart and spirit of thy handmaid to labor for the souls bought with thy blood and life. And though I am but useless dust, Thou art infinite in wisdom and power, and with thy divine favor assisting me I do not fear the infernal dragon. And since Thou dost desire me in thy name to dispose and operate what is proper for thy Church, I now command Lucifer and all his ministers of wickedness who are disturbing the Church in Jerusalem to descend to the abyss and there be silenced until thy divine Providence give them permission to come out upon the earth." This voice of the great Queen of the world was so efficacious that at the very moment She pronounced it in Ephesus all the demons in Jerusalem were cast down, the entire multitude descending to the depths of the eternal caverns without power of resisting the divine force exerted by means of most holy Mary.

407. Lucifer and his ministers of evil knew this chastisement proceeded from our Queen, whom they called their enemy because they dared not pronounce her name. They remained in hell, confused and terrified as I have recorded on other occasions (208, 298, etc.), until they were

* cf. Mt. 8:24-27 [Ed.]

permitted to rise in order to make war against the Lady herself, as shall be related further on (451). During that time they consulted anew about the means of attaining this end. Having gained this triumph over the demons, in order to continue it against Herod and the Jews most holy Mary said to Christ our Savior: "Now, my Son and Lord, if it is thy will, let one of thy holy Angels be sent to deliver thy servant Peter from prison." Christ our Lord approved of her desire, and by the will of both of them, as supreme Sovereigns, one of the supernal spirits there present was sent to unshackle the Apostle St. Peter and take him out of the prison in Jerusalem.

408. The Angel executed this command with great swiftness. Coming to the dungeon he found St. Peter bound with two chains and between two soldiers who guarded him, and many others at the door of the prison as bodyguards. The Pasch had already been celebrated, and it was the night before he was to be executed according to the sentence passed upon him. But the Apostle was so little disturbed that he was sleeping with as much unconcern as his guards (Acts 12:6). When the Angel arrived he was obliged to wake him by force, and while St. Peter was still drowsy he said to him: *Arise quickly; gird thyself, and put on thy sandals; cast thy garment about thee, and follow me* (Ib. 7-8). St. Peter found himself free of the chains and followed the Angel, without understanding what was happening to him and not knowing what this vision could mean. Having conducted him through some streets the Angel told him the omnipotent God had freed him from prison through the intercession of his most holy Mother, and then the Angel disappeared. St. Peter, coming to himself, understood the mystery and gave thanks to the Lord for this favor.

409. St. Peter thought it best to seek safety, going first to give an account to the disciples and James the Less in order to take counsel of them all. Hastening his steps he came to the house of Mary, the mother of John who was also called Mark (Ib. 12). This was the house of the Cenacle, where many of the disciples had gathered in their affliction. St. Peter called to them from the gate, and a housemaid by the name of Rhode went down to hear who was calling. Since she recognized the voice of St. Peter, she went full of joy to tell the disciples it was Peter, leaving him at the door. They thought the maid was mad, but she insisted it was Peter. Far from imagining the liberation of Peter, they wondered if it was his Angel. During these questions and answers St. Peter was in the street and called at the door until they opened it and with incredible joy and gladness saw the holy Apostle and head of the Church freed from the sorrows of prison and death. He gave them an account of all that had happened to him, how he passed through the prison with the Angel, so they could in all secrecy notify St. James and all the brethren. Foreseeing Herod would search for him with great diligence, they determined he should leave the house that night and absent himself from Jerusalem so he would not be captured again. St. Peter therefore fled, and Herod, having instituted a search in vain, chastised the guards and became infuriated against the disciples; however, due to his pride and impious proceedings God cut short his life (as I shall relate in the following chapter), severely chastising him.

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

410. My daughter, thy astonishment at the singular favor conferred by me on my servant James at his death gives me an occasion to tell thee of a privilege confirmed to me by the Most High at the time when I bore the soul of the Apostle to heaven. Although I have already on other occasions revealed to thee something of this secret, thou shalt now understand it more fully in order to increase thy filial devotion toward me. When I brought to heaven the happy soul of James, the eternal Father spoke to me, making it known to all the Blessed: "My Daughter and

Dove, chosen for my pleasure from among all creatures, let my courtiers, the Angels and Saints, understand in exaltation of my Name, for thy glory, and for the benefit of mortals, I give Thee my royal word that if men in the hour of their death invoke Thee and call upon Thee with heartfelt affection in imitation of my servant James, and solicit thy intercession with Me, I shall incline to them my clemency and look upon them with the eyes of a kind Father. I shall defend and guard them against the dangers of that last hour, and ward off the cruel enemies who vigilantly seek the perdition of souls at that critical time. Through Thee I shall give them great helps for resisting these enemies and gaining my grace if on their part they make use of this help; Thou shalt present their souls to Me, and they shall receive their excellent reward from my generous hand.”

411. For this privilege the whole Church Triumphant, and I with it, sang hymns of thanksgiving and praise to the Most High. Though the Angels have the office of presenting souls to the tribunal of the just Judge when they issue from the captivity of mortal life, yet I have this same privilege in a more exalted degree than is granted to any other creature by the Omnipotent, for I possess it by another title and by a particular and supereminent right. Many times I use these gifts and privileges, and I have done so with some of the Apostles. Since I see thee desirous of knowing how thou canst obtain from me this favor so precious to the soul, I answer thy pious desire by exhorting thee to take care lest thou make thyself unworthy by ingratitude and forgetfulness, and before all else to gain it by that inviolate purity which I expect of thee and of other souls; for the great love which I owe and cherish toward God obliges me with inmost charity and affection to desire from all creatures the observance of his holy law and the preservation of his friendship and grace. This thou must prefer before thy life, and be willing to die rather than offend thy God and highest Good.

412. Therefore I desire thee to obey me, put my doctrine into practice, and work with all thy might to imitate what thou knowest and writest of me; to permit no intermission in thy love, nor forget for one moment the heartfelt affection thou owest to the liberal mercy of thy Lord; and to be grateful for all his blessings and to me, since thy obligations are far beyond thy power of fulfillment in this mortal life. Be faithful in thy cooperation and fervent in thy devotion, ready to do what is most holy and perfect. Let thy heart expand, and do not narrow it in pusillanimity as the demon wishes thee to do. Extend thy hand to strong and powerful deeds (Prov. 31:19), filled with confidence in the Lord. Be not oppressed by adversities, thus impeding the will of the Lord in thee and the high ends of his glory. Retain vivid faith and hope even in the greatest assaults and temptations. In all this let the example of my servants James and Peter assist thee, as well as the certain knowledge of possessing through me the happy security of those who live under the protection of the Most High.* By this confidence in me and in devotion to me St. James obtained the singular favor I granted him in his martyrdom; trusting in me he undertook immense labors in order to attain that crown. Because of this confidence St. Peter remained so tranquil and content in his prison chains, nor lost for a moment the serenity of his soul, at the same time meriting that my divine Son and I had such concern for his rescue and freedom. The children of darkness make themselves unworthy of such favors because they build all their hopes on that which is visible and on their diabolical earthly astuteness.† Lift up thy heart, my daughter, and withdraw it from these deceits; aspire to what is most pure and holy, since with thee shall be the arm of the Almighty, who wrought such great wonders in me.

* cf. Ps. 90:1ff. [Ed.]

† cf. Is. 5:21; Jer. 17:5 [Ed.]