

CHAPTER XII

The Human Race having been Propagated, the Clamors of the Just for the Coming of the Messiah Increased, and also Sin Increased; in This Night of the Ancient Law God Sent Two Luminaries to Announce the Law of Grace.

163. The posterity and race of Adam spread out in great numbers, for the just and the unjust were multiplied; likewise increased the clamors of the saints for the Repairer, and the transgressions of the wicked in demerit of that benefit. The people of the Most High and the plans for the triumph of the Word in assuming human nature were already in the last stages of preparation for the advent of the Messiah. The kingdom of sin in the generation of the wicked had now spread its dominion to the utmost limits, and the opportune time for the remedy had arrived. The merits and the crowns of the just had been multiplied, and the Prophets and the holy Fathers in the joy of heavenly enlightenment perceived the approach of the salvation and the presence of the Redeemer; they increased their clamors, beseeching God to fulfill the prophecies and promises made to his people. Before the royal throne of the divine mercy they asked God to remember the long and heavy night (Wis. 17:20) which had passed in the darkness of sin since the creation of the first man, and the blindness of idolatry which had taken hold of all the rest of the human race.

164. When the ancient serpent had infected the whole earth with its poisonous breath, and apparently enjoyed peaceful control over mortals who had become blind to the light of reason (Rom. 1:20ff.) and to the precepts contained in the ancient written law; when, instead of seeking the true Divinity, men set up for themselves many false laws, and each one created a god for himself according to his own liking, without considering that the confusion of so many gods was repugnant to all goodness, order and peace; when by these errors malice, ignorance, and forgetfulness of the true God had become naturalized; when, ignorant of its mortal disease and lethargy, the world had grown mute in its prayer for deliverance; when pride reigned supreme and fools had become innumerable (Eccles. 1:15); when Lucifer in his arrogance was about to swallow the pure waters of the Jordan (Job 40:18); when by these insults God was more offended and less obliged to man, and the attribute of his justice had so well justified his cause of annihilating all creation and reducing it to its original nothingness:

165. At this juncture (according to our way of understanding) the Most High directed his attention to the attribute of his mercy, counterbalanced the weight of his incomprehensible justice with the law of clemency, and chose to yield more to his own goodness and to the clamors and faithful services of the just and the Prophets of his people than to his indignation at the wickedness and sins of all the rest of mankind. In this dark night of the ancient law He resolved to give most certain pledges of the day of grace, sending into the world two most illustrious luminaries to announce the approaching dawn of the Sun of justice, Christ our salvation. These were St. Joachim and St. Anne, prepared and created by the divine will and made according to his own Heart. St. Joachim had his home, family and relations in Nazareth, a town of Galilee. He was always a just and holy man, illumined by special grace and light from on high, and had knowledge of many mysteries of the Holy Scriptures and of the ancient Prophets. In continual and fervent prayer he asked of God the fulfillment of his promises, and his faith and charity penetrated the heavens. He was a most humble and pure man, leading a most holy and sincere life, most grave and earnest, and incomparably modest and honest.

166. The most happy Anne had a house in Bethlehem, and was a most chaste, humble and beautiful maiden. From her childhood she led a most virtuous, holy and retired life, enjoying great and continual enlightenment in exalted contemplation; moreover, she was most diligent and industrious, thus attaining perfection in both the active and the contemplative life. She had an infused knowledge of the divine Scriptures and a profound understanding of its hidden mysteries and sacraments. In the infused virtues of faith, hope and charity she was unexcelled. Equipped with all these gifts she continued to pray for the coming of the Messiah. Her prayers were so acceptable to the Lord that to her He could but answer with the words of the Spouse: *Thou hast wounded my heart with one of thy hairs* (Cant. 4:9). Hence without any doubt the merits of St. Anne hold the highest place among the saints of the Old Testament in hastening the coming of the Word.

167. This woman also prayed most fervently that the Almighty deign to procure for her in matrimony a husband who would help her to observe the ancient law and testament, and to be perfect in the fulfillment of all its precepts. At the moment in which St. Anne thus prayed to the Lord, his providence ordained that St. Joachim made the same petition; both prayers were presented at the same time before the tribunal of the most blessed Trinity, where they were heard and fulfilled, it being then and there divinely disposed that Joachim and Anne unite in marriage and become the parents of She who was to be the Mother of the incarnate God. In order to execute this divine decree the archangel St. Gabriel was sent to manifest it to both of them. To St. Anne he appeared in visible form while she was engaged in fervent prayer for the coming of the Savior of the world and Redeemer of men. When she saw the holy Prince, most beautiful and refulgent, she was disturbed and frightened, and yet at the same time interiorly rejoiced and enlightened. The holy maiden prostrated herself in profound humility to reverence the ambassador of heaven, but he detained her and comforted her, since deposited in her was that which was to be the Ark of the true manna, Mary most holy, Mother of the incarnate Word, for this holy Archangel had been informed of this sacramental mystery on being sent with this message. The other angels did not yet know of it since only to St. Gabriel had this revelation or illumination been given directly from the Lord. Neither did the Angel then manifest this great sacrament to St. Anne, but he asked for her attention and said: "The Most High give thee his blessing, servant of God, and be thy salvation. His Highness has heard thy petitions, and He desires thee to persevere in them, and to clamor for the coming of the Savior. It is his will for thee to accept Joachim as thy spouse, for he is a man of upright heart and pleasing in the eyes of the Lord. In his company thou shalt be able to persevere in the observance of his divine law and in his service. Continue thy prayers and supplications, and be not solicitous for anything else,* for the Lord himself shall ordain how they shall be fulfilled. Walk in the straight paths of justice, and let thy interior habitation be always on high. Petition always for the coming of the Messiah, and rejoice in the Lord,† who is thy salvation." With these words the Angel disappeared, leaving her enlightened in many mysteries of Holy Scriptures and comforted and renewed in spirit.

168. To St. Joachim the Archangel did not appear in a corporeal manner, but he spoke to the man of God in sleep as follows: "Joachim, be thou blessed by the right hand of the Most High. Persevere in thy desires and live in rectitude, walking in perfection. It is the will of the Lord for thee to receive Anne as thy spouse, who is a soul to whom the Almighty has given his blessing. Take care of her and esteem her as a pledge of the Most High, and give thanks to His Majesty

* cf. I Tim. 4:15 [Ed.]

† cf. Philip. 4:4 [Ed.]

because he has entrusted her to thy care.” In consequence of this divine message Joachim immediately asked for the hand of the most chaste Anne, and in joint obedience to the divine ordainment they espoused each other. But neither of them manifested to each other the secret of what had happened until several years afterwards, as I will relate in its place (*Con.* 184). The two holy spouses lived in Nazareth, continuing to walk in the justifications of the Lord. With rectitude and sincerity they gave the fullness of perfection to their virtues and works, making themselves very acceptable and pleasing to the Most High and avoiding all blemish in all their doings. The rents and incomes of their estate they divided each year into three parts: The first one they offered to the temple of Jerusalem for the worship of the Lord, the second they distributed to the poor, and the third they retained to decently sustain their life and domestics. God augmented their temporal goods due to their generosity and charity.

169. They themselves lived with each other in undisturbed peace and union of heart, without quarrel or shadow of a grudge. The most humble Anne subjected herself and conformed herself in all things to the will of Joachim, and that man of God, with equal emulation of humility, sought to know the desires of holy Anne, confiding in her with his whole heart (*Prov.* 31:11); and he was not deceived. Thus they lived together in such perfect charity that during their whole life they never experienced a time during which one ceased to seek the same thing as the other (*Mt.* 18:20); rather, being united in the Lord they enjoyed his presence in holy fear. St. Joachim, solicitous to obey the command of the Angel, honored his spouse and lavished his attention upon her.

170. The Lord prevented the holy matron Anne with the blessings of his sweetness (*Ps.* 20:4), communicating to her most exalted graces and infused science which prepared her for the happy destiny of becoming the mother of She who was to be the Mother of God himself. Since the works of God are perfect and consummate, it was natural to expect Him to make her a worthy mother of that most pure creature who would be superior in sanctity to all creatures and inferior only to God.

171. These holy spouses passed twenty years of their wedded life without issue of children. In those times and among the people of the Jews this was held to be the greatest misfortune and disgrace; hence they had to suffer much reproach and contempt from their neighbors and acquaintances, for all those who were childless were considered as excluded from the benefits of the Messiah. But the Most High desired to afflict them and dispose them for the grace which awaited them, so in patience and submission they could tearfully sow the happy fruit which they were afterwards to bring forth (*Ps.* 125:5). They continued in most fervent prayers from the bottom of their hearts, mindful of the command from on high. They offered to the Lord by an express vow that if He would give them issue they would consecrate to his service in the temple the fruit of benediction they would receive.

172. This offering was made by a special impulse of the Holy Ghost, who had ordained that She who was to be the habitation of the Son of God would, before coming into existence, be offered and as it were pledged by her parents to the same Lord; for if before knowing Her and treating with Her they had not obliged themselves by a particular vow to offer Her to the temple, upon seeing Her such a sweet and pleasing creature they would not have been able to make this vow with such promptitude due to the vehement love which they would have for Her. According to our mode of understanding such things, by this offering the Lord merely satisfied the jealousy He already had regarding his most holy Mother and whether others would have part in Her, and his love entertained itself in the delay in creating Her.

173. Having at the command of the Lord persevered a whole year in fervent petitions, it happened by divine inspiration and ordainment that Joachim was in the temple of Jerusalem offering prayers and sacrifices for the coming of the Messiah and for the fruit which he desired. Arriving with others of his town to offer the common gifts and contributions in the presence of the high priest, an inferior priest named Issachar harshly reprehended the old and venerable Joachim for presuming to come with the other people to make his offerings in spite of his being childless. Among other things he said to him: "Why dost thou, Joachim, come to offer, being a useless man? Turn away from the rest and depart; do not annoy God with thy offerings and sacrifices, which are not pleasing in his eyes." The holy man, full of shame and confusion, in humble love thus addressed the Lord: "Most high Lord and eternal God, at thy command and will I came to the temple; he who takes thy place despises me; my sins merit this ignominy; but since I accept it according to thy will, *despise not the work of thy hands*" (Ps. 137:8). Joachim departed from the temple full of sorrow (yet peaceful and calm) to a farm or storehouse which he possessed, and there in solitude he called upon the Lord for some days, praying as follows:

174. "Most high and eternal God, upon whom depends the entire existence and repair of the human race, prostrate in thy royal presence I supplicate Thee to deign in thy infinite goodness to look upon the affliction of my soul, and hear my prayers and those of thy servant Anne. To thine eyes are manifest all our desires (Ps. 37:10); and if I do not merit to be heard, do not despise my humble spouse. Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, our first fathers, do not hide thy kindness from us, nor permit, since Thou art a Father, that I be numbered among the reprobate and the outcasts in my offerings as useless because Thou givest me no issue. Remember, O Lord, the sacrifices and oblations of thy servants and Prophets (Dt. 9:27), my ancestors, and keep present their works, which were pleasing in thy divine eyes. Since Thou dost command me, my Lord, to pray to Thee with confidence, as to one powerful and rich in mercies, grant me that for which I pray at thy desire. In beseeching Thee I fulfill thy holy will and render the obedience in which Thou hast promised to grant my petition. If my sins hinder thy mercies, take away what displeases and hinders Thee. Thou art mighty, Lord God of Israel, and all that is in thy will Thou canst accomplish without hindrance (Esther 13:9). Let my prayer reach thy ears, for I am poor and small, and Thou art infinite and inclined to exercise mercy with the downcast. Whither shall I flee from Thee, who art the King of kings and the Lord of lords, and almighty? Thy sons and servants Thou dost fill with gifts and benedictions in their generations, and Thou hast instructed me to desire and hope from thy liberality what Thou hast wrought with my brethren. If it is Thy pleasure to grant to my petition, the fruit of succession I receive from thy hand I shall offer and consecrate to Thee in thy holy temple. I have surrendered my heart and my mind to thy will, and have always desired to turn my eyes away from vanity. Work in me what is according to thy pleasure, and rejoice, O Lord, our spirit with the fulfillment of our hope. Look down from thy throne upon the humble dust and raise it up so it can magnify and adore Thee, and in all things may thy will and not mine be done."

175. While Joachim made this petition in his retirement, the holy Angel declared to St. Anne how pleasing her prayer for a child was to His Highness, made with holy affection, intention and desire. Having thus recognized the will of God and of her husband Joachim, she prayed with humble subjection and confidence that it be fulfilled. "Most high God, my Lord, Creator and universal Preserver of all things, whom my soul reveres and adores as the true God, infinite, holy and eternal: Prostrate in thy royal presence I shall speak, though I am but dust and ashes (Gen. 18:27), proclaiming my need and my affliction. Lord God uncreated, make us worthy of thy benediction and give us holy fruit of the womb, that we may offer the child to thy service in thy

temple. Remember, my Lord, that Anne, thy servant, the mother of Samuel, was sterile, and yet by thy generous mercy she received the fulfillment of her desires (I Kg. 1ff.). I feel in my heart a force which encourages and animates me to ask Thee to work within me this mercy. Hear then, my sweetest Lord and Master, my humble petition; remember the services, offerings and sacrifices of my ancestors, and the favors which the powerful arm of thy omnipotence wrought in them. I desire, O Lord, to offer Thee an oblation pleasing and acceptable in thine eyes; but the greatest I can offer is my soul, my faculties and senses Thou gavest me, and my whole being. If Thou wilt look upon me from thy royal throne and give me a child, I shall from this moment consecrate and offer it for thy service in the temple. Lord God of Israel, if it be thy will and pleasure to look upon this vile and poor creature, and to console thy servant Joachim, grant me, O Lord, this petition; and in all things may thy holy and eternal will be done.”

176. These were the prayers which Sts. Joachim and Anne offered. Due to my great shortcomings and insufficiency I cannot fully describe what I was made to understand concerning the holiness of these prayers and of these saintly parents. It is impossible to tell all, nor is it necessary, since what I have said is sufficient for my purpose. In order to obtain an appropriate idea of these Saints it is necessary to estimate and judge them in connection with the most high end and ministry for which they were chosen by God, for they were the immediate grandparents of Christ our Lord, and parents of his most holy Mother.