

CHAPTER XVI

The Habits of Virtue with which the Most High Endowed the Soul of Most Holy Mary, and the First Operations by which She Exercised Them in the Womb of St. Anne; Her Majesty Herself Commences to Teach Me Doctrine for Her Imitation.

224. God directed the impetuous stream of his divinity to rejoice this Mystical City of the sanctified soul of Mary (Ps. 45:5). It took its origin from the foundation of his wisdom and goodness by which and whence He had resolved to deposit within this heavenly Lady the greatest graces and virtues ever to be given to any creature for all eternity. And when the hour had arrived for giving them into her possession, namely the very moment of her coming into natural life, the Omnipotent fulfilled according to his pleasure and full satisfaction the desire which He had held suspended from all eternity until the time for gratifying this desire would arrive. The most faithful Lord executed his design, showering down all his graces and gifts into the most holy soul of Mary at the instant of her Immaculate Conception in such an overpowering measure as no other saint, nor all of them combined, can ever attain, nor human tongue could ever manifest.

225. Although She was adorned as the Bride descending from heaven (Apoc. 21:2), endowed with all perfections and with the whole range of infused virtues, it was not necessary for Her to exercise all of them at once, but only those which She could and which were appropriate to her state in the womb of her mother. Among the first thus exercised were the three theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, which relate immediately to God. These She at once practiced in the most exalted manner, recognizing by a most sublime faith the Divinity with all his perfections and infinite attributes, and the Trinity with his distinction of Persons. This knowledge by faith was not impeded by the higher knowledge which God gave Her, as I will soon demonstrate. She exercised also the virtue of hope, seeing in God the object of her happiness and her last end. Toward this her sanctified soul at once hastened and aspired with the most intense desires of uniting Herself with Him, without turning toward any other object or even for an instant being without this movement. The third virtue, that of charity, seeing God as the infinite and highest Good, She exercised in the same instant with such intensity and appreciation of the Divinity that all the Seraphim could never reach such an eminent degree in their great intensity and virtue.

226. The other virtues which adorn and perfect the rational part of the creature She possessed in a degree corresponding to the theological virtues. The moral and natural virtues were hers in a miraculous and supernatural measure, and in a much more exalted manner did She possess the gifts and fruits of the Holy Ghost in the order of grace. She had an infused knowledge and habits of all these virtues and of the natural arts, by which she recognized and knew the whole natural and supernatural order of things in accordance with the grandeur of God. Hence from her first instant in the womb of her mother She was more wise, more prudent, more enlightened, and more capable of comprehending God and all his works than all the creatures (outside of her most holy Son) have been or ever will be in eternity. And all this perfection consisted not only in the habits which were infused into Her in such a high degree, but in the acts which She exercised in correspondence with the excellence of her state and in proportion to the activity of the divine power. Therefore her perfection was not circumscribed by any other bounds, nor was subject to any other limits, than the divine and most just pleasure of God.

227. Since regarding these virtues and graces and their operations much will be said in the course of this History of the most holy life of Mary, I shall only mention here something regarding how She acted at the instant of her Immaculate Conception, along with the habits infused into Her and the actual light She received with them. In the exercise of the theological virtues, as I have said, and of the virtue of religion and the cardinal virtues consequent upon it, She perceived God as He is and as the Creator and Glorifier; in heroic acts She revered Him, praised Him, rendered Him gratitude for having created Her, loved Him, feared Him, and adored Him, offering sacrifices of worship, praise and glory for his immutable Being. She recognized the gifts She had received (though some of them were yet hidden to Her), and She gave thanks with profound humility, prostrating Herself immediately in the womb of her mother, though yet in a body so small, and by these acts She merited more than all the saints in the highest state of perfection and sanctity.

228. In addition to the acts of infused faith She possessed other knowledge of the mystery of the Divinity and of the most holy Trinity. And although in that instant of her Immaculate Conception She did not see Him intuitively as the Blessed do, yet She saw Him in abstractive vision by a light and vision which, though inferior to the beatific vision, were nevertheless superior to all the other ways in which God can or does manifest Himself to the created intelligence; for there were shown to Her images of the Divinity so clear and manifest that She understood the immutable being of God, and in Him all creation, with a greater light and clearness than any creature is ever understood by another. These images were like a most clear mirror from which was resplendent the whole Divinity, and in Him all creatures, so in God She saw and recognized, by means of this light and these images of the divine nature, all things with a greater distinctness and clearness than was possible by the images of the infused science already given to Her.

229. In all these different ways was laid open to Her from the very instant of her Immaculate Conception the vision of all men and angels in their hierarchies, dignities and operations, and of all the irrational creatures with their natures and conditions. She knew the creation, state, and ruin of the angels, with the justification and glory of the good ones, and the fall and punishment of the wicked ones; the first state of Adam and Eve in their innocence; their deception, and the guilt and misery in which the first parents were left because of it, and through them the whole human race; the determination of the divine will to repair it, and how it was already approaching; the disposing of the order and nature of the heavens, stars and planets; the condition and arrangement of the elements; purgatory, limbo and hell; and how all these things and whatever is contained in them were created by the divine power and were maintained and preserved only by his infinite goodness, without having need of any of them (II Mach. 14:35). Above all She understood the most high sacraments regarding the mystery in which God was to make Himself man in order to redeem the entire human race, having left the wicked angels without this remedy.

230. In addition to knowing all these wonders in their order, the most holy soul of Mary, in the instant it was united with her body, also began eliciting heroic acts of the virtues with incomparable admiration, praise, glorification, adoration, humility, love of God, and sorrow for the sins committed against that highest Good whom She recognized as the Author and end of such admirable works. She hastened to offer Herself as an acceptable sacrifice to the Most High, beginning from that instant with fervent desire to bless Him, love Him, and honor Him, because She perceived the bad angels and men failed to know and love Him. She requested the holy angels, whose Queen She already was, to help Her to glorify the Creator and Lord of all, and to pray also for Her.

231. The Lord in this instant showed Her also her Guardian Angels, whom She recognized and accepted with joyful submission, inviting them to sing canticles of praise to the Most High alternately with Her. She announced to them beforehand that this was to be the service which they were to render Her during the whole time of her mortal life, in which they were to act as her assistants and guards. She was informed moreover of her whole genealogy, and the genealogy of all of the rest of the holy people chosen by God, the Patriarchs and Prophets, and how admirable His Majesty was in the gifts, graces and favors wrought in them. It is worthy of admiration that although the exterior faculties of her body at the creation of her most holy soul were hardly large enough to be distinguished, nevertheless so none of the miraculous excellence with which God could endow his Mother would be lacking He ordained by the power of his right hand that in perceiving the fall of man She shed tears of sorrow in the womb of her mother at the gravity of the sin against the highest Good.

232. In this wonderful sorrow at the instant of her coming into existence She began to seek a remedy for mankind and to commence the work of mediation, intercession and reparation. She presented to God the clamors of the holy fathers and the just of the earth so in his mercy He might not delay the salvation of mortals, whom even then She looked upon as her brethren. Before She ever conversed with them She loved them with the most ardent charity, and with the very beginning of her existence She assumed the office of Benefactress of men and exercised the divine and fraternal love enkindled in her Heart. These petitions the Most High accepted with greater pleasure than the prayers of all the saints and angels, and this pleasure of God was also made known to Her who was created to be the Mother of God himself, though She did not know this her destiny; yet She knew the love of the Lord and his desire to descend from heaven in order to redeem men. It was just for God to feel Himself more obliged to hasten this coming due to the prayers and petitions of that creature for whom He would principally come, and in whose womb He would receive human flesh, accomplishing in Her the most admirable of all his works and fulfilling the purpose of all creatures together.

233. She also prayed at the moment of her Immaculate Conception for her natural parents, Joachim and Anne, whom She saw and knew in God before She saw them in the body. Immediately She exercised the virtues of love, reverence and gratitude of a daughter, acknowledging them as the secondary causes of her natural being. She made many other petitions in general and for particular objects. By the infused science She possessed She then composed a canticle of praise in her mind and Heart for having at the entrance into life found the precious drachma which we have all lost in our first beginning (Lk. 15:9). She found the grace which issued forth to meet her (Ecclus. 15:2), and the Divinity who awaited Her at the threshold of her existence (Wis. 6:15). Her faculties of body and soul encountered at the instant of her creation the most noble Object which moved and initiated them, for they were created solely for Him; and being his in and for all things, She gave Him the first fruits of their operations, which were the knowledge and love of God, for in this Lady there was no existence without knowledge of God, no knowledge without love, and no love without merit. Nor was there in Her anything small, or measured merely by the common laws or general rules. She was altogether great, and great did She come forth from the hands of the Most High in order to proceed and arrive at such an excellence of being that God alone would be greater. *How beautiful are thy steps, O Prince's Daughter* (Cant. 7:1), since with thy first one Thou didst reach the Divinity! Thou art twice beautiful (Ib. 4:1), because thy grace and beauty encompass all beauty and graces. Heavenly are thine eyes, and thy thoughts are as *the purple of the King* (Ib. 7:5), since Thou hast carried away

his Heart, and hast wounded and bound Him by thy hair (Ib. 4:9), and hast brought Him a prisoner of thy love into union in thy virginal womb and Heart.

234. There in truth did the Spouse of the King sleep while her Heart was awake (Ib. 5:2). There those bodily faculties, which scarcely had yet attained their natural form and had not yet seen the material light, were asleep, and that heavenly Heart, more marvelous because of the greatness of its gifts than by the smallness of its size, was watching in the chamber of the womb of her mother with the light of the Divinity which bathed Her and enkindled Her in the fire of its immense love. It was not proper in this heavenly creature for the inferior faculties of the soul to act before the superior ones, nor to operate in an inferior or merely an equal manner to those of any other creature; for if the operations correspond to the essence of each creature, She who was always superior to all of them in dignity and excellence was also to be superior in her operations to all creatures, angelic and human. Not only was She not to fall short of the excellence of the angelic spirits, who made use of their faculties at the moment of their creation, but this prerogative was due to Her in superior excellence since She was created as their Queen and Lady, and this by so much more as the name and office of Mother of God excels that of servants, and that of Queen the state of vassals. For to none of the angels had the Word said: Thou shalt be my Mother (Heb. 1:5); nor could any one of them say to Him: Thou art my Son. Only between Mary and the incarnate Word was this commerce and mutual correspondence, and by this must be measured and studied the greatness of Mary, in the same way as the Apostle measured the greatness of Christ by his being the Son of the eternal Father.

235. In writing of these sacraments of the King (Tob. 12:7), however honorable it is to reveal his works, I confess my ineptitude and limitation of a woman, and I am afflicted because I am speaking in such common and vague terms which fall entirely short of that which I perceive in the light given to my soul for the understanding of these mysteries. In order to avoid offending such greatness it would be necessary to use other words, reasonings, and particular and appropriate terms which are beyond my ignorance; yet even if I had them they would be surpassed and oppressed by human weakness, which must therefore recognize itself inferior and unequal to the task of fixing its eyes on this heavenly sun by which the rays of the Divinity issue upon the world, though concealed by the cloud of the maternal womb of St. Anne. If we seek permission to approach this wonderful sight, let us come near free and unshackled; let us not allow ourselves to be detained, neither by our natural cowardice nor by a base fear and hesitation, even though it be under the cloak of humility. Let us all approach with the greatest devotion and piety, free from the spirit of contention (Rom. 13:13); then we will be permitted to examine with our own eyes the fire of the Divinity burning in the bush without consuming it (Ex. 3:2).

236. I have said the most holy soul of Mary, at the moment of her most pure Conception, saw the divine essence abstractively, for it was not revealed to me that She saw the essential glory; rather, I understood this latter privilege was unique to the most holy soul of Christ, such being due and consequent upon the substantial union of the Divinity in the Person of the Word, since it was appropriate for the soul of Christ to be not for one moment deprived in all its faculties of the highest grace and glory. Just as the man Christ, our highest Good, began to be conjointly God and man, so He began at the same instant also to know and love God as one already possessing Him, that is as a comprehensor. But the soul of his most holy Mother was not united substantially with the Divinity, and therefore She did not begin her activity as a possessor of God, but entered into life as a wayfarer. However, She entered this state of wayfarer as one in closest proximity to the hypostatic union, and therefore She was endowed with a vision of God

proportionate and most immediate to the beatific vision. Her vision was inferior to the beatific, but superior to all the visions and revelations which have been vouchsafed to other creatures, always excepting the clear vision and fruition of the Blessed; nevertheless, in some respects and in regard to some qualities the perception of God by the Mother of Christ in her first instant excelled even the intuitive vision of other creatures insofar as She penetrated abstractively into greater mysteries than they. Moreover, though She did not see God face to face at the moment of her Immaculate Conception, She was favored with that kind of vision many times afterwards during the course of her life, as I will say later on.

*INSTRUCTION WHICH THE QUEEN OF HEAVEN
GAVE ME REGARDING THIS CHAPTER.*

237. In the preceding chapters of this History I said a few times (*Intro. Part I 7, 17; Con. 7*) the Queen and Mother of Mercy had promised that when I would begin to describe the first operations of her faculties and virtues She would instruct me how to model my life after her own, for this would be the principal purpose of showing it to me as in a mirror. And this great Lady, most faithful to her promises, besides continuing to assist me by her heavenly presence and the explanation of these mysteries, began to fulfill this promise in this chapter and told me to expect the same as long as I would continue to write this divine History. Accordingly at the end of each chapter I shall write down what Her Majesty shall teach me, as She has done even now, speaking to me in the following manner:

238. “My daughter, I desire thee to reap for thyself the fruits which thou dost desire from the description of the mysteries and sacraments of my holy life, and let the reward of thy labors be the greater purity and perfection of thy life, disposing thyself by the grace of the Most High to practice what thou hearest. It is the will of my divine Son for thee to exert all thy powers toward that which I shall teach thee, and to apply thyself with all thy heart to my virtues and works. Hear me with attentive faith, for I shall speak to thee words of eternal life and teach thee what is most holy and perfect in the Christian life and most acceptable in the eyes of God. Begin even now to dispose thyself for the reception of the light in which thou shalt see the hidden mysteries of my most holy life and the doctrine which thou dost desire. Continue in this exercise and write down that which I shall teach thee in this regard. And now listen.

239. “It is an act of justice due to the eternal God for the creature, when he receives the use of reason, to direct his very first movement toward God. By knowing God he should begin to love Him, reverence Him, and adore Him as his Creator and only true Lord. The parents have a natural obligation to give instruction to their children in this knowledge, setting them with care on the straight path from their childhood, so from this early age they seek their last end and walk this path in their first acts of the intellect and will. They should with great watchfulness withdraw them from the pettiness and puerile foolishness to which depraved nature will incline them if left without direction. If the fathers and mothers would be solicitous to prevent these vanities and perverted habits of their children, and would instruct them from their childhood in the knowledge of their God and Creator, they would afterwards easily accustom them to know and adore Him. My holy mother (who knew not my wisdom and state) was in this matter very punctual and anticipatory, for when she bore me in her womb she adored in my name the Creator and offered worship and gratitude for his having created me, beseeching Him to defend me and bring me forth to the light of day from the condition in which I then was. So also parents should pray with

fervor to God that the souls of their children, through his providence, may obtain Baptism and be freed from the servitude of original sin.

240. “And if the rational creature has not known and adored the Creator from the first dawn of reason, he should do this as soon as he obtains knowledge of the essential God by the light of faith. From the reception of this knowledge the soul must labor never to lose Him from sight, always fearing Him, loving Him, and reverencing Him. Thou, my daughter, hast owed this adoration to God throughout the course of thy life; but now I desire thee to practice it in a more perfect manner as I shall show thee. Direct the interior vision of thy soul upon the being of God, who is without beginning and without limit. Contemplate his infinite attributes and perfections, that He alone is true sanctity, the highest Good, the most noble Object of creatures; that He alone gave being to all things, and without having need of them sustains and governs them. He is consummate beauty without spot or any defect. In love He is eternal, in words true, and in promises most faithful. He it was who gave his own life and subjected Himself to sufferings for the good of his creatures, without waiting for any merits on their part.* Over this wide field of goodness and benefits extend thy vision and occupy thy faculties, without forgetting or wandering away therefrom; for having known Him so much as the highest Good, it would be ugly rudeness and disloyalty to forget Him with abhorrent ingratitude, which would be thine if having received superior divine light of infused faith (above the common and ordinary) thou wouldst allow thy understanding and will to swerve from the path of divine love. If at any time in thy weakness it nevertheless happens, quickly seek it again with all haste and diligence, humbly adoring the Most High and giving Him honor, magnificence, and eternal praise. Remember thou must consider it thy proper duty to do this incessantly for thyself and for all the rest of creatures, and in this I desire thee to live carefully.

241. “And in order for thee to practice this teaching with greater force, confer in thy heart what thou knowest I did, how that first sight of the highest Good left my heart wounded with love, by which I gave myself entirely to Him in order never to lose Him. My whole life was consumed in this, and I ceased not to press forward in order to arrive at the center of my desires and affections; for the Object being infinite, neither must love end or rest until He is attained. Along with the knowledge of God and his love, thou must pursue the knowledge of thyself, pondering and comparing his grandeur with thy smallness and vileness. Take notice that when these truths are well understood, repeated, and meditated upon, they will cause divine effects in the soul.” Having heard these teachings and others of the Queen, I said to Her Majesty:

242. “My Mistress, whose slave I am and to whom I dedicate and consecrate myself anew, not without cause has my heart desired and asked for this day on which, according to thy maternal condescension, I can come to know thy heavenly doings and hear thy sweet and salutary words. I confess, my Queen, with all my heart that I can claim no goodness on my part which deserves such a benefit as a reward, and if I was not obeying thy will and that of thy divine Son I would look upon the attempt to write thy Life as an unpardonable presumption. Receive, my Lady, this sacrifice of praise from me, and speak so thy servant may hear (I Kg. 3:10). Let thy most gentle voice, O sweetest Lady, resound in my ears (Cant. 2:14), for Thou hast the words of life (Jn. 6:69). Continue, my Mistress, thy doctrine and light, so it can dilate my heart in the sea of thy perfections, furnishing me with worthy material for the praise of the Almighty. In my bosom burns the fire which thy kindness has enkindled, in order to desire in the practice of the virtues what is most holy, most pure, and most acceptable in thy eyes. Yet in my inferior part I feel in

* cf. I Jn. 4:10, 19 [Ed.]

my members the law repugnant to the law of the spirit (Rom. 7:23), detaining me and embarrassing me, and I justly fear it will hinder me from attaining the good which Thou, most kind Mother, dost offer to me. Therefore look upon me, my Lady, as a daughter, teach me as a disciple, correct me as a servant, and compel me as a slave whenever I am tardy or resist Thee. I do not want to fail Thee willingly, but in my weakness I may relapse. I shall lift up my vision to know the being of God, and by his divine grace govern my affections so they may become enamored with his infinite perfections; and if I hold Him, *I will not let Him go* (Cant. 3:4). But Thou, Lady and Mother of knowledge and of beautiful love (Ecclus. 24:24), beseech thy Son and my Lord, for the sake of his most generous liberality in favoring thy humility (Lk. 1:48), not to forsake me, O Queen and Mistress of all creation.”