

CHAPTER XXII

How St. Anne Complied after Her Childbirth with the Command of the Law of Moses, and how the Infant Mary Conducted Herself in Her Infancy.

344. It was a precept of the law, given in chapter XII of Leviticus, that a woman who had given birth to a daughter would be deemed impure for two weeks, and remain in the state of purification for sixty-six days after the birth (double the days required for the birth of a male child) (Lv. 12:5). Having completed the days of her purification she was to present herself in order to offer a lamb one year old as a holocaust for the daughter or the son, and also a young pigeon or turtledove for sin (Ib. 6). This she was to do at the door of the tabernacle, beseeching the priest to offer them to the Lord and to pray for her; thereupon she was accounted pure. The parturition of the most happy Anne was pure and undefiled, as befitting her heavenly Daughter, in whose purity the mother participated. Although for this reason there was no need of a special purification, she nevertheless complied with the obligation of the law to the very last point. Though not subject to its penalties, she considered herself bound in the eyes of men.

345. Sixty days of the purification having passed, St. Anne departed for the temple, her mind inflamed with divine ardor and bearing in her arms her blessed Daughter and Child. With the offerings prescribed by the law and accompanied by innumerable Angels she went to the gate of the temple and spoke with the high priest, who was none other than Simeon. He was accustomed to spend much time in the temple and enjoyed the privilege and favor of seeing the child Mary not only when She was offered and presented to the Lord in the temple, but on other occasions. Although this holy priest on these occasions was not fully aware of the dignity of this heavenly Lady, as I will say farther on (423, 710, 742), yet he always experienced great promptings and impulses of his spirit that this Child was great in the eyes of God.

346. St. Anne offered to him the lamb and the turtledove with the rest of the gifts, and with tears of humility she asked him to pray for herself and the Child, her Daughter, so the Lord would forgive them any fault of which perhaps they might be guilty. His Majesty certainly had nothing to forgive in a Daughter and mother in whom grace was so copious, but He found Himself obliged to reward the humility by which being so holy they nevertheless presented themselves as sinners. The holy priest received the oblation, and in his spirit he was inflamed and moved to extraordinary jubilation; and without understanding why, nor manifesting what he felt, he said within himself: "What strange feeling is this within me? Are these women perhaps the kinswomen of the Messiah who is to come?" Moved by this joyful suspense he showed them great benevolence. The blessed mother Anne entered the temple, bearing her most holy Daughter on her arms, and she offered Her to the Lord with most devout and tender tears, for she alone in all the world knew what Treasure was given into her charge.

347. St. Anne renewed the vow which she had already made to offer her firstborn to the temple upon arriving at the proper age. In renewing this offering she was enlightened by new graces and promptings of the Most High, and in her heart she heard a secret voice urging her to fulfill this vow and offer her Child to the temple within three years. It was as it were the echo of the voice of the most holy Queen, who in her prayer touched the bosom of God so this voice could resound in the bosom of the mother; for when both entered the temple the sweet Child, seeing with her bodily eyes its grandeur and magnificence, dedicated to the worship and adoration of the Divinity, experienced wonderful effects in her spirit and wanted to prostrate Herself in the temple, to kiss its floor and adore the Lord. But since She could not execute these desires in

external actions, She supplied the defect with interior fervor, and She adored and blessed the Lord with a love more ardent and a humility more profound than ever before or after was possible to be rendered by any creature. Speaking with the Lord in her Heart, She offered the following prayer:

348. "Most high and incomprehensible God, my King and my Lord, worthy of all glory, praise and reverence, I, humble dust, yet thy creature, adore Thee in this thy holy place and temple. I magnify and glorify Thee for thy infinite Being and perfections, and I render Thee gratitude insofar as my littleness can obtain thy condescension. For Thou hast vouchsafed to permit my eyes to see this holy temple and house of prayer, where thy holy Prophets and my forefathers have worshipped and blessed Thee, and where thy liberal mercy has wrought with them such great wonders and sacraments. Receive me, O Lord, so I may serve Thee in it when it shall be thy holy will."

349. Thus She who was the Queen of heaven and of the universe offered Herself as if She was the lowest slave of the Lord. As a testimony of its acceptance by the Most High a most resplendent light shone down from heaven, enveloping the mother and Child and filling them with new splendors of grace. Again St. Anne was made aware that she would be expected to devote her Daughter to the temple within three years. She was given to understand that the delight with which God looked forward to such an offer, and the love with which the heavenly Child desired its consummation, would not permit a longer delay. The holy Angels of her guard and innumerable others who were present on this occasion sang sweetest songs of praise to the Author of these wonders; but they did not therefore have a more perfect knowledge of these happenings than St. Anne or her most holy Daughter, who perceived interiorly what was spiritual and felt exteriorly what was subject to the senses in these matters. St. Simeon dimly saw the sensible light. Thereupon St. Anne, rich in her Treasure and endowed with new gifts of the most high God, returned to her home.

350. The ancient serpent eagerly observed all these events; yet the Lord concealed from him what he was not to know, and permitted him to obtain knowledge only of what was necessary for his own undoing in his desire of destroying others, and only so much as would serve to make him an instrument in the execution of the secret judgments of the Most High. This enemy was full of conjectures in regard to the unheard-of events which had come to pass in connection with this mother and Child. But when he saw they brought offerings to the temple, and like sinners observed what the law commanded, even begging the priest to pray for them so they could be pardoned, he deceived himself and calmed his fury, believing this mother and her Daughter were of ordinary condition, though more perfect and holy than others.

351. The sovereign Child was treated like other children of her age. Her nourishment was of the common kind, though in quantity very small, and so was her sleep, although her parents were solicitous for Her to take more sleep. She was not troublesome, nor did She ever cry with the annoyance of other children, but was extremely pleasant and calm. So She could largely conceal the source of this wonder She many times cried and sobbed for the sins of the world (though as a Queen and Lady, insofar as her age permitted) and for its Redemption through the coming of the Savior. Ordinarily She maintained, even in her infancy, a pleasant countenance, yet mixed with gravity and a peculiar majesty, never showing any childishness. She sometimes permitted Herself to be caressed, though by a secret influence and a certain outward austerity She knew how to repress the imperfections connected with such endearments. Her prudent mother Anne treated her Child with incomparable solicitude and caressing tenderness; also her father Joachim loved Her as a father and as a saint, though he was ignorant of the mystery at that time. The

Child on her part showed a special love toward him, as one whom She knew as her father and much beloved of God. Although She permitted more tender caresses from her father than from others, yet God inspired the father as well as all others with such an extraordinary reverence and modesty towards Her whom He had chosen for his Mother that even his pure and fatherly affection was outwardly manifested only with the greatest moderation and reserve.

352. In all things the infant Queen was graceful, most perfect and admirable. Though She passed her infancy subject to the common laws of nature, yet this did not hinder the influx of grace. During her sleep her interior acts of love, and all the other exercises of her faculties which were not dependent on the exterior senses, were never interrupted. This special privilege is possible also in other creatures if the divine power confers it on them; but it is certain that in regard to Her whom He had chosen as his Mother and the Queen of all creation He extended this special favor beyond all previous or subsequent measure in other creatures and beyond the conception of any created mind. God spoke to Samuel and to other Saints and Prophets in their sleep (I Kg. 3:4), and to many He sent mysterious dreams or visions (Gen. 37:5, 9), for to his omnipotence it is easy to enlighten the mind during the inactivity of the senses in natural sleep or during their ravishment in ecstasy; they cease to act in the one as well as the other, and without their activity the soul hears, accepts and transacts the things of the spirit. This was the perpetual rule with the Queen from her Immaculate Conception until now, and for all eternity, for the activity of grace in Her during her pilgrimage through life was not intermittent as in other creatures. When She was alone or laid to sleep, which in Her was most moderate, She conferred about the mysteries and praises of the Most High with her holy Angels, and enjoyed the divine visions and discourses of His Majesty. And because her communication with the Angels was so frequent, I shall relate in the following chapter the ways in which they manifested themselves to Her, and some of their eminent perfections.

353. Queen and Lady of heaven, if as a most kind Mother and my Teacher Thou shalt listen to my ignorance without being offended by it, I shall ask of thy kindness the solution of some doubts which have occurred to me in this chapter. If my ignorance and boldness transgress the limits, instead of answering me, my Lady, correct me with maternal mercy. My doubt is: In this thy infancy didst Thou feel the necessities and hunger which according to the natural order children feel? And if Thou didst feel them, how didst Thou suffer these annoying inconveniences? And how didst Thou ask for the nourishment and the other help necessary, since Thou wast so wonderfully patient that Thou wouldst not make use of tears, which serve other infants as speech and words? I am also ignorant whether the hardships of that age were not most irksome to Thy Majesty, such as to have thy virginal body clothed and unclothed as infants are, to be fed with the food of other children, and to undergo the other experiences of that age? For other children undergo them bereft of reason, while nothing was concealed from Thee, O Lady. When I look upon Thee as a Child in age and yet grown up in thy capacity of judging things, it seems to me almost impossible that there would have been no inconveniences in this matter, in the time or the measure, or in other circumstances regarding the treatment allotted to Thee during thy infant life. Thy celestial prudence taught Thee to preserve dignity and composure; yet Thou didst not intimate the wants and needs of thy age and condition either by crying, as an infant, or by word of mouth, as one grown up. Thus they could not know thy needs and could not treat Thee as one endowed with reason, for even thy mother could not know all these things, nor could she provide for all that was necessary, since she knew not the time nor the manner of serving Thy Majesty in all things. All these considerations excite my admiration and arouse in me the desire of knowing the mysteries thus concealed.

ANSWER AND INSTRUCTION OF THE QUEEN OF HEAVEN.

354. “My daughter, since thou art full of wonder I shall inform thee in all kindness. It is true I was in possession of grace and the use of reason from the first instant of my Immaculate Conception, as I have so often shown thee. I underwent the hardships of infancy as other children, and I was raised and treated as others of the same condition. I felt hunger, thirst, sleepiness, and other infirmities of the body, and as a daughter of Adam I was subject to these accidental necessities, for it was just for me to imitate my most holy Son, who subjected Himself to these hardships and defects so He could merit so much the more and be an example to the rest of mortals for their imitation. Since I was governed by divine grace I made use of eating and sleep in moderation, allowing myself less than others, and only so much as was proper for the augmentation and preservation of my life and health. Disorder in these matters is not only against virtue, but against the well-being of nature itself, which is invaded and ravaged by it. Due to my exquisite composition I was affected by hunger and thirst more painfully than other children, and the lack of nourishment was more dangerous to me; but if it was given to me at unseasonable times, or in excess, I bore it with patience, until by some appropriate sign I could manifest my needs. I felt less the lack of sleep because of the opportunity which it furnished me for the vision and conversation with the Angels regarding the divine mysteries.

355. “Being bound and wrapped in clothes was not painful to me, but rather was a cause of much joy, for I understood by divine light that the incarnate Lord was to suffer a most cruel death and was to be bound most shamefully. Whenever I was alone during my childhood I placed myself in the form of a cross, praying in imitation of Him, for I knew my Beloved was to die in that position, though I did not know then the Crucified was to be my Son. In all the discomforts I suffered after I was born into the world I remained content* and cheerful, for there was one consideration I never set aside in my interior, one which I desire thee always to keep in mind, which is to ponder in thy heart and mind the most honorable truths which I saw so thou mayest form a correct judgment of all things, giving to each the esteem and value which is its due. In regard to this the children of Adam are ordinarily full of error and blindness, but I desire thee, my daughter, to not share it with them.

356. “As soon as I was born into the world and made aware of the light which shone upon me, I felt the effects of the elements, the influence of the planets and of the stars, of the earth which sustained me, of the nourishment which sustained me, and of all the other things of this life. I gave thanks to the Author of all things, acknowledging his works as benefits freely bestowed upon me and not as dues which He owed to me. Therefore when anything was lacking of the necessities of life I remained in peace and contentment, and deemed it all perfectly reasonable and proper in my regard, since I had merited none of the gifts and could justly be deprived of all of them. Hence if I acknowledged this, thereby merely asserting a truth which human reason cannot ignore or deny, where is the common sense of mortals, or what use do they make of their understanding, when at the refusal of things which they desire and of which perhaps they do not even profit, they begin to get sad and lash themselves into fury one against the other, and even against their God, as if they were suffering some injury at his hands? Let them inquire: What treasures and riches did they possess before they came into life? What services had they rendered unto God in order to merit them? And if out of nothing there cannot arise anything, and if they could not merit the being which they have received, what obligation is there on the part of God

* cf. I Tim. 6:6 [Ed.]

to preserve out of justice what was given to them entirely gratuitously? That God created man was of no benefit to Himself, but to man it was a benefit, and one as great as the being given to him and as high as the object for which it was given. And if in his creation man becomes indebted so much that he never can pay his debt, tell me what right can he invoke at present for his preservation? Has he not received his being without merit and many times forfeited it? How can he claim the guarantee and pledge of unfailing plenty?

357. "If the first movement and operation was an invoice and a debt by which man is obliged, how can he with such impatience demand favors? And if in spite of all this the supreme goodness of the Creator furnishes him graciously with what is necessary, why should he disturb himself when lacking what is superfluous? O my daughter, what an execrable disorder and despicable blindness of mortals is this! For that which the Lord gives them gratuitously they do not thank Him, or even give Him acknowledgment; and for that which He denies them justly and sometimes most mercifully they are restless and proudly desirous, and they try to procure it by unjust and unlawful means, pursuing after the very danger which flees from them. The first sin alone committed by man, thereby losing God, also forfeited the friendship of all creatures; and if the Lord himself would not restrain them they would turn in vengeance upon man and refuse to render any service or help for sustaining his life. The heavens would deny them their light and benign influences, the fire would refuse its heat, the air would cease to serve for respiration, and all the other things would in their manner refuse their services, since they would in justice be bound to refuse them. Then when the earth would deny its fruits, and the elements their moderation and assistance, and all the other creatures would arm themselves to avenge the wrongs of their Creator (Wis. 5:18), perhaps disgraced man would humiliate himself in his vileness and would not heap up the wrath of the Lord for the certain day of reckoning (Rom. 2:5), when He shall press this so formidable charge.

358. "But thou, my friend, flee from such base ingratitude, and humbly acknowledge thou hast received thy being and life gratuitously, and that its Author gratuitously preserves it for thee. Freely dost thou receive all the other benefits without any merit of thine; and thus, receiving much and repaying little, thou daily makest thyself less worthy of favors, while the liberality of the Most High grows continually with thy indebtedness. Let this thought be uppermost in thee always so it can awaken and move thee to many acts of virtue. If any of the irrational creatures fail thee, I desire thee to rejoice in the Lord and give thanks to His Majesty, and bless them for their obedience to the Creator. If the rational creatures persecute thee, love them with all thy heart and regard them as the instruments of divine justice, which gives thee some opportunity of rendering satisfaction for that which thou owest thy Lord. By labors, adversities and tribulations strengthen and console thyself, not only considering them as fully deserved by the faults committed, but deeming them ornaments of the soul and most rich jewels given thee by thy Spouse.

359. "Let this be the answer to thy doubt. Over and above this I desire to give thee an instruction which may be found in all the chapters. Consider then, soul, the punctuality of my holy mother Anne in fulfilling the precept of the law of the Lord, to whose grandeur this solicitude was very acceptable. In this thou must imitate her by observing inviolate each and every one of the precepts of thy rules and constitutions, for God shall reward most generously this fidelity and severely punish any negligence in this matter. I was conceived without sin, and it was not necessary to present me to the priest so the Lord could purify me, nor was this necessary for my mother, since she was very holy; nevertheless, we humbly obeyed the law, and thereby we merited a great increase of virtue and grace. Despising just and wise laws and frequently

dispensing with them destroys the worship and fear of God, and fatally confuses government among men. Beware of easily dispensing with the obligations of the religious state, either for thyself or for others. If infirmity or some other just cause makes it advisable, let it be done with moderation and with the approbation of thy confessor, thus justifying dispensation before God and before men by the approbation of holy obedience. If thou findest thyself weary or weakened, do not at once become remiss in the strict observance, for God shall give thee strength according to thy faith in Him. Do not give any dispensation on the pretext of being overworked. Make that which is less serve and advance that which is greater; let the creatures serve the Creator. Due to thy position as superioress thou hast less excuse, for in the observance of the laws thou must give a good example, leading on the others; hence for thyself no merely human motive can serve as an excuse, though thou mayest sometimes excuse thy sisters and subjects on such account. Note moreover, my dearest, that I desire thee to lead in perfection; therefore this rigor is necessary, not even taking into consideration that the observance of the precepts is a duty to God and men. Let no one think it is enough to fulfill all obligations toward the Lord and at the same time tread underfoot the duties towards his neighbor, to whom is due good example and avoidance of all real scandal." O Queen and Mistress of all creation, would I could attain the purity and virtue of the supernal spirits so this inferior part of my being, which weighs down the soul (Wis. 9:15), would prompt me to fulfill thy celestial teachings. I have become burdensome unto myself (Job 7:20); but with thy intercession and the gracious favor of the Most High I shall be able to obey thy will and his with a loving promptitude of heart. Let not thy intercession and support, and the guidance of thy holy and wise counsels, ever fail me!