

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 present to thy condescension 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: Didst Thou in thy infancy feel the necessities and hunger which according to the natural order other children feel? And if Thou didst suffer these hardships, how didst Thou ask for the nourishment and necessary help, since thy patience was so admirable, and when in other children crying serves as words and speech? I am also ignorant whether the inconveniences of that age were distressing to Thy Majesty, such as having thy virginal body clothed and unclothed as infants are, being given the food of other children, and other things which the rest of children undergo without the use of reason, while to Thee, Lady, nothing was hidden. For when I consider Thee at the age of an infant, and yet great in the capacity to give due deliberation in all matters, it seems to me nearly impossible that in the manner, the time, the amount, and in other circumstances in which these services were rendered Thee there was no excess or fault. Thy celestial prudence preserved worthy dignity and composure, and thy age and nature and its laws demanded what was necessary; yet Thou didst not ask for it by crying as an infant, or by speaking as older children; nor could others know thy mind, or treat thee as one who had the use of reason; nor could thy holy mother know all these particulars, nor ascertain or provide all things exactly, since she knew not the time or the manner of serving Thy Majesty in all things. All this causes me wonder, and awakens in me the desire to know the mysteries which in these matters are concealed.

ANSWER AND INSTRUCTION OF THE QUEEN OF HEAVEN.

354. “My daughter, regarding thy wonder I shall respond with benevolence. It is true I possessed grace and the use of reason from the first instant of my Conception, as I have so often shown thee. I underwent the inconveniences of infancy as other children, and I was raised according to the common order in all things. I felt hunger, thirst, sleepiness, and other hardships in my body, and as a daughter of Adam I was subject to these necessities, since it was just for me to imitate my most holy Son, who accepted these defects and pains whereby His Majesty could merit and be an example to the rest of mortals who must imitate Him. Since I was governed by divine grace, I made use of food and sleep in weight and measure, taking less than others and only the precise amount necessary for the augmentation and preservation of my life and health, because disorder in these matters is not only against virtue but against nature itself, which is altered and ruined by it. Due to my temperament and moderation I felt hunger and thirst more than other children, and any lack of nourishment was more dangerous to me; yet if it was not given to me on time, or if it was in excess, I practiced patience, until by some opportune and appropriate sign I could manifest my needs. I felt less the lack of sleep, for being alone I was free for the vision and conversation with the Angels regarding the divine mysteries.

355. “Being bound and wrapped in clothes did not cause me much pain, but rather much joy, for by divine light I knew the incarnate Word was to suffer a most cruel death and would be ignominiously bound. When I was alone at that age 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 at that time the Crucified would be my Son. In all the discomforts I suffered after I was born into the world I remained content and cheerful, since there was one consideration I never set aside in my interior, and which I desire thee to keep inviolate and perpetual, which is to ponder in thy heart and mind the most righteous truths upon which I reflected, so without error thou mayest judge all things,* giving to each the value and weight which is its due. In this matter the children of Adam are ordinarily involved in error and blindness, and I do not desire thee, my daughter, to be like them in this regard.

356. “As soon as I was born into the world and saw the natural light which illumined me, I felt the effects of the elements, the influences of the planets and stars, of the earth which received me, of the nourishment which sustained me, and of all the other causes in support of life. I gave thanks to the Author of all things, acknowledging his works as benefits freely given me and not as debts owed to me. For this reason when anything was lacking of the necessities of life I met it without disturbance, but rather with joy, confessing what was done with me was reasonable since all had been given to me freely without my meriting it, and thus it was just for me to be deprived of it. Hence tell me, soul, having said this, thereby confessing a truth which human reason cannot ignore or deny, where is the sense of mortals, or what judgment do they have, when lacking something which they greatly desire, and which perhaps is not proper for them, they become sad and infuriated with each other, and even irritated with God himself, as if they received from Him some offense? Let them ask themselves: What treasures and riches did they possess before they received life? What services had they rendered to the Creator to oblige Him to give them these things? And if nothingness cannot earn anything, nor merit the being given it from nothing, what obligation of justice is there to sustain the being gratuitously given? That God created man was not a benefit which His Majesty made for Himself, but for the creature it was a great benefit, as

* cf. Jn. 7:24 [Ed.]

great as the being itself and the purpose for which it was given; and if in receiving his being man incurs a debt which can never be repaid, tell me what right can he now claim when, having been given his being without meriting it, God preserves it even though this has been demerited so many times? Where does he have the guarantee and pledge that he shall lack nothing?

357. “If the first movement and operation was a bill and an obligation by which man is more indebted, how can he impatiently ask for the second? And if nevertheless the supreme goodness of the Creator graciously furnishes him with what is necessary, why is he disturbed when he lacks what is superfluous? O my daughter, what an execrable disorder and odious blindness of mortals is this! For that which the Lord graciously gives them they do not thank Him, or even repay Him with recognition; and for that which He denies them in justice, and sometimes with great mercy, they are restless and become arrogant, procuring it by unjust and illicit means and falling into the very danger which flees from them.* By the first sin alone committed by man God was lost together with the friendship of all creatures; and if the Lord himself would not restrain them they would all turn on man to avenge the insult against God, denying man the operations and services the Lord gave them to sustain man’s life: The heavens would deny their light and influences, the fire would refuse its heat, the air would cease to serve for respiration, and all the other things would in their manner do the same, since they would in justice be bound to do so. Then when the earth denies its fruits, and the elements their moderation and cooperation, and the other creatures are armed to avenge the contempt of the Creator (Wis. 5:18), perhaps ungrateful and wretched man would humble himself and would not amass the wrath of the Lord for the certain day of reckoning (Rom. 2:5), when He shall press this so formidable charge.

358. “And thou, my friend, flee from such grave ingratitude, and humbly acknowledge thou hast received thy being and life freely, and that its Author freely preserves it for thee. Without thy merit thou dost receive all the other benefits, and by receiving much and repaying little thou makest thyself each day less worthy of favors, while the liberality of the Most High grows along with thy indebtedness. I desire this consideration to be continuous in thee 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 because they obey the Creator. If the rational creatures persecute thee, love them with all thy heart and consider them as instruments of divine justice, giving thee some way of rendering satisfaction for that which thou owest thy Lord. Embrace labors, adversities and tribulations and console thyself, for besides deserving them due to faults committed, they are the adornment of thy soul and most rich jewels of thy Spouse.

359. “This shall be the answer to thy doubt. In addition to this I desire to give thee the doctrine offered thee 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 mandates of thy rule and constitutions, for God shall generously reward this fidelity, and render what is deserved for any negligence in this matter. I was conceived without sin, and it was not necessary to go to the priest so the Lord could purify me, nor was this necessary for my mother, since she was very holy, yet we humbly obeyed the law, thereby meriting great increases of virtues and grace. Disregarding just and well-ordered laws, and dispensing with them at every turn, causes loss of the worship and fear of God, and confuses and destroys human government.

* cf. *Transfixion* 381-384, and especially 385 [Ed.]

Beware of easily dispensing with the obligations of thy religious order, either for thyself or for others. When infirmity or some other just cause permits it, let it be done with moderation and by the counsel of thy confessor, thus justifying it before God and men by the approbation of obedience. If thou findest thyself weary or thy strength weakened, do not immediately relax the strict observance of the rule, for God shall give thee strength according to thy faith; and never dispense from remaining active. Make that which is less serve and wait upon that which is greater, and let the creatures serve the Creator. Due to thy office as Abbess thou hast less excuse, since in the observance of the laws thou must give a good example, leading by example; for thee there must never be a merely human cause for dispensation, though thou mayest sometimes excuse thy sisters and subjects. And take notice, my dearest, that from thee I desire the best and most perfect; for this it is necessary to be strict, since the observance of the precepts is a duty to God and men. Let no one think it is enough to fulfill his duties to the Lord if the duties to his neighbors are trodden underfoot, to whom is due good example and giving no matter for true scandal." Queen and Mistress of all creation, I would desire to 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 be prompt in fulfilling this celestial doctrine. *I am become burdensome to myself* (Job 7:20), yet by thy intercession and the favor of the grace of the Most High obtain for me, my Lady, obedience to his will and thine with promptitude and affection of heart. May thy intercession, help, and teaching of thy holy and most exalted doctrine ever fail me.