

CHAPTER XXIV

The Holy Exercises and Occupations of the Queen of Heaven in the First Year and a Half of Her Infancy.

377. The enforced silence of other children in their first years, and the slow development of their intellect and power of speech arising from natural weakness, was heroic virtue in the infant Queen. For if speech is the product of the intellect and as it were the result of its activity, and if She was in perfect possession of all her faculties since her Immaculate Conception, then the fact that She did not speak as soon as She was born did not arise from the lack of ability but because She did not want to make use of her power. Other children are not furnished with the natural forces which are required to open their mouth and move their tender tongue as required for speech, but in the child Mary there was no such defect; for as far as her natural powers were concerned She was stronger than other children, and since She exercised sovereignty and dominion over all creation She certainly could exercise it in regard to her own powers and faculties if She had chosen to do so. Her not speaking therefore was virtue and great perfection, which opportunely concealed her science and grace, and evaded the astonishment naturally caused by one speaking in infancy. And if it is admirable for someone to speak who naturally ought to be incapable of speech, I do not know whether it is more admirable for one who is able to speak from her birth to be silent for one year and a half.

378. It was ordained therefore by the Most High that the sovereign Child would voluntarily keep this silence during the time in which ordinarily other children are unable to speak. The only exception made was in regard to the conversation held with the Angels of her guard, or when She addressed Herself in vocal prayer to the Lord, for in regard to communication with God, the Author of speech, and with the holy Angels, his messengers, when they treated in a visible manner with Her, this reason for maintaining silence was not necessary; on the contrary, it was appropriate for Her to pray with her lips and her tongue since there was no impediment, and because it would not be proper to keep them unemployed for so long a time. But her mother never heard Her, nor did she know of her ability to speak during that period, and from this it can be better understood what perfection it required in Her to pass that year and a half of her infancy in total silence. But during that time whenever her mother freed her arms and hands the child Mary immediately grasped the hands of her parents and kissed them with great submission and reverent humility, and in this practice She continued as long as her parents lived. She also sought to make them understand during that period of her age that She desired their blessing, speaking more by the affection of her Heart than by word of mouth. So great was her reverence for them that never did She fail in the least point concerning the honor and obedience due to them, nor did She cause them any trouble or annoyance, since She knew beforehand all their thoughts and was anxious to fulfill them before they were made manifest.

379. In all her actions and movements She was governed by the Holy Ghost, being perfect in all her actions; yet her most ardent love was never satisfied, unceasingly renewing her fervent aspirations to emulate still greater gifts (I Cor. 12:31). The presence of the Most High continually preserved in this sovereign Child the divine revelations and the intellectual visions; and if sometimes his providence suspended one kind of vision or enlightenment, She was enraptured by others, for from the clear vision of the Divinity (which I said above took place as soon as She was born and raised to heaven by the Angels [332]) She retained the species of what She had known. Thus coming from the wine cellar where charity is set in order (Cant. 2:4), her

Heart remained so wounded with love that turning Herself toward this vision in contemplation She was entirely inflamed; and since her body was yet tender and weak, and this love strong as death (Ib. 8:6), She soon felt the death pangs of love of which She in her tenderness would have died had not the Almighty strengthened Her and preserved by a miracle the inferior part of her being and her natural life. Many times however the Lord permitted this tender and virginal little body to be overcome by the violence of her love so the holy Angels could sustain and comfort Her, fulfilling the saying of the Spouse: *Fulcite me floribus, quia amore languedo*, that is, *stay me up with flowers, because I languish with love* (Ib. 2:5). And this, the most noble kind of martyrdom, was a thousand times repeated in this heavenly Lady, surpassing in it all the Martyrs in merit, and also in sufferings.

380. The pain of love is so sweet and attractive that the more it prevails the more it is sought, and he who suffers it longs to hear him spoken of whom he loves, thus seeking to be cured by the renewal of the wound. This most sweet ploy serves to keep the soul in suspense between a painful life and a sweet death. This was the state of the child Mary when speaking to her Angels and hearing them converse about her Beloved. She asked them many times, saying: "Ministers of my Lord and his messengers, most beautiful works of his hands, sparks of that divine fire which enkindles my heart, since thou dost enjoy his eternal beauty unveiled and unrestrained, reveal to me the tokens of my Beloved. What are the conditions of my cherished One? Tell me whether perhaps I have displeased Him; let me know what He desires and seeks of me, and do not delay in alleviating my pain, for I am languishing with love."

381. And the supernal spirits replied: "Spouse of the Most High, thy Beloved is alone, He who is of Himself, who has no need of anything, rather all need Him. He is infinite in perfections, immense in greatness, without limit in power, unending in wisdom, without measure in his goodness. He gave a beginning to all creation without having a beginning Himself, He governs it without fatigue, He preserves it without having need of it, He sees the beauty of all creation, yet his beauty cannot be comprehended by anyone, and by it makes Blessed those who come to see Him face to face. Infinite are, O Lady, the perfections of thy Spouse, exceeding thy understanding, and his exalted judgments are inscrutable for the creature."

382. In such colloquies and many others too high for our capacity most holy Mary passed her infancy, conversing with her Angels and with the Most High, becoming more and more like unto Him. As her fervor and longing to see our highest Good increased, being entirely enraptured in Him, She was by the disposition of the Lord many times carried bodily by the hands of the Angels to the empyrean heaven where She enjoyed the presence of the Divinity. On some of the occasions in which She was thus raised to heaven She saw Him clearly, while at other times it was by infused images, yet of the highest and clearest of this kind of vision. She saw also the angels by clear and intuitive vision, their degrees, orders and hierarchies, and She understood many great sacraments by this benefit. Since these visions were often repeated, by becoming accustomed to them, and by acts of virtue which She exercised in connection with them, She gradually began to appear more a divine than a human creature. No one else could ever be capable of such favors and of others connected therewith, and even the mortal nature of the Queen herself would have been deprived of life if She had not been preserved by a miracle.

383. When in her childhood it was necessary to accept any service or benefit at the hands of her parents or of any other creature She always received it with interior humility and gratitude, beseeching the Lord to reward the good which they did out of love for Her. Though She had attained such a high degree of sanctity and was filled with the light of God and his mysteries, She nevertheless judged Herself to be the least of all creatures; and whenever She made

comparisons She ascribed to Herself the last place of all. * She considered Herself unworthy even of the nourishment necessary to sustain life, though She was the Queen and Mistress of all creation.

INSTRUCTION OF THE QUEEN OF HEAVEN.

384. My daughter, he who receives more ought to consider himself more needy, since his debt becomes so much the greater. All should humble themselves since of themselves they are nothing, nor can they possess or do anything.[†] For this same reason those who, being mere dust, are raised up by the powerful hand of the Almighty must more firmly humble themselves to the very earth, since left to themselves and of themselves they are without being[‡] and unprofitable, finding themselves more indebted and obliged for that which by themselves they cannot repay. Let mankind acknowledge its condition, for no one can say: I have made myself,^Δ I preserve myself in existence, I can prolong my life or postpone death. All his being and preservation is in the hands of the Lord. Let each one therefore humble himself in his presence, and thou, my dearest, do not forget these truths.

385. I desire thee also to esteem as a great treasure the virtue of silence, which I began to keep from my birth. Knowing in the Most High all the virtues by the light I received from his powerful hand, I attached myself to this one with great affection, resolving to adhere to it as a companion and a friend during all my life. Therefore I kept it inviolate, though I could speak from the moment of my entrance into the world. To speak without moderation and forethought is a two-edged sword which wounds both him that speaks and him that hears, and thus in two ways destroys charity or hinders it in all the virtues. From this thou canst understand how much God is offended by the vice of inconsiderate and loose talk, and how justly loquacity and the tumult of disputation estranges his spirit and veils his presence, for those who talk much cannot keep free from grievous sins (Prov. 10:19). Only with God and with his saints can one speak with security, and even then it must be with forethought and discretion. With creatures it is very difficult to preserve the golden middle, without danger of passing from the correct and necessary to the imperfect and superfluous.

386. The way to avoid this danger is to tend continually toward the other extreme, striving rather to reflect and be silent,[•] for the prudent medium of speaking only what is necessary is found more in reflection than in immoderate speech. Remember, soul, thou cannot engage in self-sought conversation with creatures without relinquishing God in the secret interior of thy soul; and that which thou cannot do without impudence and insult in thy communication with other creatures thou must not do in thy dealings with thy Lord and the Lord of all. Close thy ears to the deceitful conversations which might compel thee to speak what thou must not, for it is not just for thee to speak more than what is commanded thee by thy Master and Lord. Listen to his holy law which He has with such a generous hand written in thy heart; hear the voice of thy Pastor and answer Him there, and Him only. I desire to impress upon thee the fact that if thou art to be my disciple and companion it must be by signaling thyself especially in this virtue of

* cf. Lk. 14:10 [Ed.]

† cf. Jn. 15:5 [Ed.]

‡ cf. Acts 17:28 [Ed.]

Δ cf. Ps. 99:3 [Ed.]

• cf. James 1:19 [Ed.]

silence. Reflect much and write this doctrine in thy heart today, and attach thyself more and more to this virtue, for first I desire to see thee established in this, and then I shall teach thee how to speak.

387. I do not discourage thee from speaking words of admonition and consolation to thy daughters and thy subjects. Speak also with those who can give thee tokens of thy Beloved and instruct and inflame thee with his love. In such kind of conversation thou shalt acquire a profitable silence of the soul, since in them is excited a horror and disgust for the conversation of men, taking pleasure only in conversation about the eternal Good whom thou dost desire. By the force of love, which transforms thy being in the Beloved, the impetus of thy passions will weaken, and thou shalt arrive at that kind of sweet martyrdom which I suffered when I complained of my body and of mortal life, for they seemed to me a dreary imprisonment which hindered my flight, though not my love. O my daughter, forget all earthly things in the hiding place of thy silence, and imitate me with all thy fervor and all thy strength, for thus shalt thou arrive at that state to which thy Spouse invites thee. There thou shalt hear the consoling words which sustained me in the pangs of my love: "My dove, dilate thy heart, and give admission, my cherished one, to that sweet pain, for my Heart is wounded by thy love." Thus the Lord spoke to me, and this thou thyself hast heard repeatedly, for to those who are alone and in silence does His Majesty speak.