

CHAPTER XXV

How the Most Holy Child Mary began to Speak at the Age of One and a Half Years, and Her Occupations until Her Presentation in the Temple.

389. The time had arrived in which most holy Mary could profitably and with perfect propriety break her blessed silence, in which the voice of that heavenly Turtledove was to be heard on our earth (Cant. 2:12) so She could be the faithful harbinger of the springtime of grace. But before She was commissioned by the Lord to speak with men (which was at the age of eighteen months of her tender infancy) She was favored with a vision of the Divinity, not intuitive but intellectual, which was a summary of those already received, and which augmented the previous gifts and graces. In that vision a colloquy took place between the Child and the highest Lord which I tremblingly presume to reproduce in words.

389. The Queen spoke to His Majesty: “Most High Lord and incomprehensible God, how canst Thou favor the most useless and poor creature? How canst Thou incline thy grandeur in such kind condescension toward thy slave, who is insufficient for making a proper return? The Most High looks down upon the servant? The Powerful enriches the needy one? The Holy of Holies bends to the dust? I, O Lord, am a little one among the creatures, and least of all merit thy favors; what shall I do in thy divine presence? With what shall I make payment for what I owe Thee? What have I, O Lord, which is not thine, since Thou givest me being, life and movement? But I rejoice, my Beloved, that Thou dost possess all good, and outside of Thee the creature possesses nothing, and that thy inclination and glory is to raise up the little one, favor the most useless, and give being to nothingness, for thus thy magnificence becomes more known and magnified.”

390. The Lord answered Her and said: “My Dove and beloved One, Thou hast found grace in my eyes; Thou art sweet, my friend and chosen One, in my delights. I desire to manifest what in Thee shall be for my greater pleasure and complaisance.” These promises of the Lord wounded anew the most tender, yet quite robust, Heart of the infant Queen, and to languish by the force of her love. The Most High in his pleasure continued and said: “I am the God of mercies, and with immense love do I love mortals; and among so many who by their sins have disobliged Me, I have some just and friends who have served Me and do serve Me from their heart. I have determined to give them a remedy, sending my Onlybegotten so they might not be deprived of my glory nor I of their eternal praise.”

391. To this proposition the most holy child Mary responded: “Most high Lord and powerful King, thine are all creatures and thine the power; Thou alone art the holy One and the supreme Ruler of all creation. May thy own goodness move Thee, O Lord, to hasten the coming of thy Onlybegotten for the Redemption of the children of Adam. Let now the desired day of my ancient forefathers come, and let mortals see thy eternal salvation. Why, my beloved Master, since Thou art a most kind Father of mercies, dost Thou delay so much the day which thy captive and afflicted children expect with such hope? If my life can be of any service, I offer it promptly to Thee as a sacrifice to obtain it for them.”

392. The Most High urged Her with great benevolence to pray from then on many times each day for the hastening of the Incarnation of the eternal Word and the Redemption of the entire human race, and to bewail the sins of men which impede their salvation and restoration. And He then told Her it was now time to exercise all her outward faculties, and for his own greater glory

it was appropriate for Her to converse with human creatures. And in order to comply with this in obedience the Child said to His Majesty:

393. “Most high Lord of incomprehensible majesty, how can mere dust, she who is the least of all those born of woman, dare to treat of such hidden and supernal mysteries, so inestimably precious in thy bosom? How can I oblige Thee on behalf of men, and what can a creature accomplish who has served Thee in nothing? But Thou, my Beloved, shalt be obliged by poverty itself, and the infirm shall find health, the thirsty shall desire the fountains of thy mercy, and shall obey thy divine will. If Thou ordainest, O my Lord, that I unbind my lips in order to converse and speak with others besides Thee, who art all my good and my desire, I beseech Thee to consider my frailty and danger. It is very difficult for rational creatures not to fall into excess in speech; hence I would rather keep silence my entire life, if such be thy pleasure, in order not to risk losing Thee, for if this would happen it would be impossible for me to outlive it one moment.”

394. This was the answer of the most holy child Mary, for She was full of apprehension because of the new and dangerous duty of conversing with men which was now enjoined upon Her. As far as her inclinations were concerned, if God had allowed it She desired to observe inviolate silence and be mute during all her life. O great confusion and shining example for the ignorance of mortals, that She who could not sin in speech trembled at its dangers! And that which we cannot speak without sinning causes our death and ruin in speaking it! Yet, sweetest Child and Queen of all creation, how dost Thou desire to remain silent? Dost Thou not see, my Lady, that thy silence would be the ruin of the world, the sorrow of heaven, and even (according to our curtailed understanding) a great void for the most blessed Trinity itself? Dost Thou not know that only one response of thine, given to the holy Archangel, *fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum* (Lk. 1:38), shall give the plenitude of perfection to all that exists? To the eternal Father thy reply shall give a Daughter, to the eternal Son a Mother, and to the Holy Ghost a Spouse; reparation to the angels, remedy to men, glory to the heavens, peace to the earth, an Advocate to the world, health to the sick, life to the dead, and the fulfillment of the will and pleasure of all that God can desire outside of Himself. Since the greatest work of the infinite power and all the good of creation thus depends solely on thy word, how canst Thou, my Lady and Mistress, desire to remain silent when Thou shalt speak so well? Speak then, O Child, and let thy voice be heard through all the confines of heaven.

395. With the most prudent answer of his Spouse the Most High was much pleased, and his Heart was again wounded by the loving fear of our great Child. Therefore, as if fully requited by their Beloved, and as if conferring among Themselves in regard to her petition, the three divine Persons spoke those words of the Canticles (8:8-9): “*Our sister is little, and hath no breasts. What shall we do to our sister in the day when she is to be spoken to? If she be a wall, let us build upon it bulwarks of silver.* Little art Thou, our beloved sister, in thine eyes, yet great art Thou and great shalt Thou be in our eyes. In this self-deprecation Thou hast wounded our Heart with one of thy hairs (Ib. 4:9). Thou art little in thy own judgment and estimation, and by this Thou dost attract and enamor Us. Thou hast not as yet the breasts of nourishing words; but Thou also art not a woman according to the law of sin, for in regard to Thee this law has not applied, nor do We desire it to extend over Thee. Thou dost humble Thyself, though Thou art great beyond all creatures; Thou dost fear, though Thou art secure; Thou dost anticipate a danger which cannot approach Thee. What shall We do for this our sister on the day in which according to our will She shall open her lips in order to bless Us, while mortals open theirs in order to blaspheme our holy Name? What shall We do in order to celebrate so festive a day as that in

which She must begin to speak? With what shall We reward her so humble modesty, She who was always delightful in our eyes? Sweet was her silence, and most sweet will be her voice in our ears. If She is a strong wall built with the virtue of our grace and made secure by the power of our arm, We shall reinforce it with bulwarks of silver to make Her more enriched and precious, and her words, when She must speak, most pure, candid, fluent, and sonorous to our ears; our grace shall overflow from her lips (Ps. 44:3), and our powerful hand and protection shall be with Her.”

396. While this conference took place between the three divine Persons (according to our understanding), our infant Queen was strengthened and consoled in her humble solicitude regarding the first exercise of her speech. The Lord promised Her that He would govern her words and assist Her to direct them all toward his service and pleasure. She then petitioned His Majesty anew for his permission and blessing to open her lips so full of grace, and being prudent and considerate in all things She spoke her first words to her parents, St. Joachim and St. Anne, asking them for their blessing, and thus acknowledging that from them after God She had received her life and being. The happy parents heard Her and at the same time they saw She was able to walk by Herself. The happy Anne in great joy of her spirit took Her into her arms and said: “My Daughter and Beloved of my heart, blessed and glorious to the Lord be the hour in which we hear thy words and in which Thou dost begin to walk in his holy service. Let thy words and reasons be few, well measured and considered, and let thy footsteps be directed aright toward the service and honor of our Creator.”

397. The most holy Child heard these and other exhortations of her holy mother Anne, and She engraved them in her tender Heart to preserve them in profound humility and obedience. During the year and a half which remained of the three before her departure into the temple She spoke but few words other than those addressed to her mother, for St. Anne, in order to hear Her speak, was accustomed to call Her and request Her to speak of God and his mysteries. The heavenly Child fulfilled her desire, listening to and asking questions of her mother; She who excelled in wisdom all those born of woman desired to learn and to be instructed. Thus the Daughter and mother passed their time in sweetest colloquies concerning the Lord.

398. It would not be easy or even possible to describe the doings of the heavenly child Mary during these eighteen months of companionship with her mother. The latter shed copious and sweet tears of love and gratitude when at times she looked upon her Child, more venerable than the symbolic Ark of the Covenant. Yet never did St. Anne reveal the secret of her heart that her Daughter was chosen to be the Mother of the Messiah, though they often spoke of this ineffable mystery. At such times the Child was inflamed with the most ardent love, and She spoke of it in the most exalted terms, innocently extolling her own dignity without being aware of it, while her most happy mother St. Anne was filled more and more with joy, love and solicitude for her Daughter and the Treasure of her heart.

399. The strength of the tender Child was by far inadequate for the fulfillment of the exercises and practices of humility to which her humble love urged Her, for this Mistress of all creatures esteemed Herself the lowest of them all and was anxious to exhibit these humble sentiments in her actions by taking upon Herself the most abject and servile occupations of the household. She feared that if She did not serve all who were with Her She could not satisfy her obligations and would fall short of her duty in the sight of the Lord. While the real cause of Her not performing all that She desired was none other than the insufficiency of her bodily forces, and while the highest Seraphim would have kissed the places where her sacred feet had touched, yet She was often full of holy fear lest She be deprived of doing the most humble services, such as cleaning

and scrubbing the house. Since She was not always permitted to engage in such things when others were present She tried to do it when alone, being on such occasions assisted by the holy Angels, and thus in some measure reaping the fruit of her humility through their help.

400. The family of Joachim was not rich, though at the same time he could not have been called poor. Conformable to the honored standing of her family, St. Anne desired to dress her most holy Daughter as best she could afford within the bounds of decency and modesty. The most humble Child yielded to this maternal solicitude during the time of her voluntary silence without protest, but when She began to speak She humbly asked her mother not to clothe Her in costly and showy garments, but to procure for Her garments of coarse and poor material, if possible such as had already been worn by others, and of an ash grey color, similar to that which in our day is worn by the nuns of St. Clare. The holy mother, who looked upon and respected her Daughter as a lady, answered: "My Daughter, I will conform to thy desire in regard to the form and color of thy dress, but thy strength will not permit the coarseness which Thou dost desire, and in this regard I desire Thee to obey me."

401. The Child, obedient to the will of her mother and never objecting in anything, acquiesced and allowed Herself to be clothed in the garments which were provided. They were of the color and form desired by Her, and similar to the dress worn by children dedicated to a devout life. Although She desired them to be coarser and poorer, She supplied this desire by obedience, deeming obedience more precious than sacrifice (I Kg. 15:22). Thus the most holy child Mary had the merit of obedience to her mother and of humility in her aspirations, deeming Herself unworthy of the use of even that which is necessary to preserve natural life. In the virtue of obedience to her parents She was most distinguished and exact during the three years of her stay with them. By her divinely infused science She knew their interior desires, and thus She was beforehand in fulfilling them to the minutest point. She asked the permission and blessing of her mother for whatever She undertook to do Herself, kissing her hand with great humility and reverence. The prudent mother outwardly permitted this, while inwardly she venerated the grace and exalted dignity of her Daughter.

402. At times She would retire to enjoy, by Herself and with greater liberty, the company and communication of her holy Angels, and to give outward tokens of the burning love of her Spouse. In some of her exercises She prostrated Herself, tearfully afflicting that most perfect and tender little body of hers for the sins of mortals, supplicating the mercy and blessings of God for them, and striving to gain these favors by the exercise of heroic virtues. The grief of her Heart because of the sins made known to Her, and the pangs of love with which it was accompanied, caused in the heavenly Child most intense sorrow and pain; nevertheless, in order to be in all things the Mother of Mercy and the Mediatrix of Grace, She taxed also her bodily strength during that tender age in works of penance and mortification, sparing no exertion which time and opportunity permitted in order to gain grace for Herself and for us men.

403. When She reached the age of two years She began to exercise her special pity and charity toward the poor. She solicited alms for them from St. Anne, and the kind-hearted mother readily granted her petitions, both for the sake of the poor and to satisfy the tender charity of her most holy Daughter, at the same time encouraging Her, who was the Mistress of charity and perfection, to love and esteem the poor. Besides giving what She obtained expressly for distribution among the poor, She reserved part of her meals for the same purpose, so from her infancy it could be said of Her more truly than of holy Job: *From my infancy mercy grew up with me* (Job 31:18). She gave to the poor not as if conferring a benefit upon them, but as paying a debt due in justice, saying in her Heart: This my brother and master deserves what he needs and

what I possess undeservedly. In giving alms She kissed the hands of the poor, and whenever She was alone She kissed their feet, or if this was impossible She would kiss the ground over which they had passed. Never did She give an alms to the poor without conferring still greater favors on their souls by interceding for them and thus dismissing them relieved in body and soul.

404. Not less admirable were the humility and obedience of the most holy Child in permitting Herself to be taught to read and to do other things as other children in that time of life. She was instructed in reading and other arts by her parents and She submitted, though She had infused knowledge of all things created. The Angels were filled with admiration at the unparalleled wisdom of this Child, who willingly listened to the teaching of all. Her holy mother Anne, as far as her intuition and love permitted, observed with rapture the heavenly Princess and blessed the Most High in Her. But as the time for presenting Her in the temple approached, along with her love grew also the dread of the approaching end of the three years set by the Almighty, and the consciousness that the terms of her vow must be punctually fulfilled. Therefore the child Mary began to prepare and dispose her mother, manifesting to her six months before her ardent desire of living in the temple. She recounted the benefits which they had received at the hands of the Lord, how much they were obliged to seek his greater pleasure, and how, when She would be dedicated to God in the temple, She would be more her Daughter than in their own house.

405. The holy mother Anne heard the discreet arguments of her child Mary, and although she was resigned to the divine will and wanted to fulfill her promise of offering up her beloved Daughter, yet the natural force of her love for such an unequalled and beloved Treasure, joined with the full understanding of her inestimable value, caused a mortal strife in her most faithful heart at the mere thought of her departure, which was close at hand. There is no doubt that she would have lost her life in this fierce and vivid sorrow if the hand of the Almighty had not comforted her, for the grace and dignity of her heavenly Daughter was fully known to her and had entirely ravished her heart, making the presence of the child Mary more dear to her than life itself. Full of this grief she said to the Child: "My beloved Daughter, for many years I have longed for Thee, and only for a few years do I merit to have thy company; but in this let the will of God be fulfilled. I do not want to be unfaithful to my promise of sending Thee to the temple, but there is yet time left for fulfilling it. Have patience until the day arrives for the accomplishment of thy desires."

406. A few days before most holy Mary reached the age of three years She was favored with an abstractive vision of the Divinity in which it was made known to Her that the time of her departure for the temple ordained by God had arrived, and that there She was to live dedicated and consecrated to his service. Her most pure soul was filled with new joy and gratitude at this prospect, and speaking with the Lord She gave Him thanks, saying: "Most high God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, my eternal and highest Good, since I cannot praise Thee worthily, let it be done in the name of this humble slave by all the angelic spirits, since Thou, immense Lord, who hast need of none, dost look upon this vile wormlet by the greatness of thy generous mercy. From whence comes to me such a benefit, that Thou dost receive me into thy house and service, since I do not even merit the most despised place on the earth which sustains me? Yet if thy own grandeur obliges Thee to accept me therein, I beseech Thee, my Lord, to place the fulfillment of this thy holy will in the hearts of my parents so they may thus execute it."

407. Then St. Anne had a vision in which the Lord commanded her to fulfill her promise by presenting her Daughter in the temple on the very day on which her third year would be complete. There is no doubt this command was a greater sorrow for the mother than that given to Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac; but the Lord consoled and comforted her, promising his grace

and assistance in her loneliness during the absence of her beloved Daughter. The holy matron showed herself submissive and prompt in complying with what the most high Lord had commanded her, and obediently she answered by the following prayer: "Lord God eternal, Master of my entire being, I have offered to thy temple and service my Daughter, whom Thou in thy ineffable mercy hast given me; She is thine, and I give Her to Thee with gratitude for the time which I have had with Her, and for having conceived and raised Her. Yet remember, God and Lord, that in guarding thy inestimable Treasure I was rich; having her company in this desert and valley of tears was joy in my sorrow, alleviation in my labors, a mirror for the regulation of my life, and an example of supernal perfection which stimulated my tepidity and inflamed my affection. Through this Creature alone have I hoped for thy grace and mercy, and finding myself without Her I am all afraid of failing in a single point in thy service. Heal, O Lord, the wound of my heart, and deal with me not as I have deserved, but look upon me as a kind Father of mercy. I shall present my Daughter in the temple as Thou, Lord, hast commanded."

408. St. Joachim also had a visitation or vision of the Lord at this time, receiving the same command as St. Anne. Having conferred with each other, and taking account of the will of the Lord, they resolved to fulfill it with humble submission and appointed the day on which the Child was to be brought to the temple. Great was also the grief of this holy old man, though not quite so great as that of St. Anne, for the high mystery that She was the future Mother of God was yet concealed from him.

INSTRUCTION OF THE QUEEN OF HEAVEN.

409. My dearest daughter, keep in mind that all the living are born destined for death but ignorant of the time allowed them. This they know for certain, however, that the term of life is short, eternity is without end, and only in this life can they harvest what shall yield eternal life or eternal death. In this dangerous pilgrimage of life God has ordained that no one shall know for certain whether he is worthy of his love or hate (Eccles. 9:1), and if he uses his reason rightly this uncertainty will urge him to seek with all his powers the friendship of that same Lord. God justifies his cause as soon as the soul acquires the use of reason, for from that time onward He enlightens, urges and guides man toward virtue and draws him away from sin, teaching him to distinguish between water and fire,* to approve of the good and reject evil, to choose virtue and repel vice; moreover, God calls and rouses the soul by his holy inspirations and continual promptings, provides the help of the Sacraments, doctrines and Commandments, urges man onward through his angels, preachers, confessors, ministers and teachers, by special tribulations and favors, by the example of strangers, by trials, deaths, and other happenings and dispositions of his providence. He disposes the things of this life in order to draw toward Him all men, for He desires all to be saved (I Tim. 2:4). Thus He places at the disposal of the creature a vast field of benevolent help and assistance which he can and should use for his own advancement.

410. Opposing all this are the tendencies of the inferior and sensitive nature, infected with the *fomes peccati*, the foment of sin, tending toward sensible objects and moved by the concupiscible and irascible passions, disturbing the reason and entralling the will in the false liberty of ungoverned desires. The demon also, by his fascinations and his deceitful and iniquitous suggestions, obscures the interior light (Wis. 4:12) and hides the deathly poison beneath the pleasant exterior. But the Most High does not immediately forsake his creatures; He renews his

* cf. Eccles. 15:17 [Ed.]

mercy and his assistance, recalling them again and again, and if they respond to his first call He adds others according to his equity, increasing and multiplying them in proportion as the soul corresponds. As a reward of the victory which the soul wins over himself the force of his passions and concupiscences is diminished and the spirit is made free to soar higher and rise above its own inclinations and above the demons.

411. But if man neglects to rise above his low desires and his forgetfulness he yields to the enemy of God and man. The more he alienates himself from the goodness of God, so much the more unworthy does he become of the secret callings of the Most High, and so much the less does he appreciate his assistance, though it be great; for the demon and the passions have obtained a greater dominion and power over his intellect and have made him more unfit and more incapable of the grace of the Almighty. Thereupon, my dear daughter, rests the whole salvation or condemnation of souls, that is, in beginning to admit or resist the advances of the Lord. I desire thee not to forget this doctrine, so thou mayest respond to the many calls which thou receivest from the Most High. Make sure to be strong in resisting his enemies and punctually solicitous in fulfilling the pleasure of thy Lord, for thereby thou shalt gratify Him and attend to the commands made known to thee by divine light. I loved my parents dearly, and the tender words of my mother wounded my heart; but since I knew it to be the will of the Lord to leave them, I forgot her house and my people (Ps. 44:11) in order to follow my Spouse. The proper education and instruction of children will do much toward making them more free and habituated to the practice of virtue, since thus they will be accustomed to follow the sure and safe guiding star of reason from its first dawn.

END OF BOOK ONE