

CHAPTER XX

What Happened during the Nine Months of the Pregnancy of St. Anne; the Works of Most Holy Mary in the Womb, and Those of St. Anne during that Time.

311. Most holy Mary, being conceived without sin (as just described), by that first vision She had of the Divinity remained entirely absorbed in spirit and elevated by the Object of her love, a love which began in the narrow tabernacle of the maternal womb at the instant in which her most blessed soul was created, and was never to be interrupted, but rather to continue through all the eternities of that high glory which She now enjoys at the right hand of her divine Son. So She could grow in the contemplation and love of God, in addition to the infused species of knowledge She received of other created things, and the knowledge which resulted from her first vision of the most holy Trinity, and so She could exercise Herself in many acts of virtue possible to Her in the womb, the Lord repeated the wonderful vision and abstractive manifestation of his divinity on two other occasions. Hence the blessed Trinity manifested Himself to Her in abstractive vision three times before her birth: First at the instant of her Conception, then in the fourth or fifth month, and the third time on the day before her birth. However, it must not be inferred that although this abstractive vision was not continual She failed to have another more inferior type of vision, itself very exalted and superior to the one by which She perceived the essence of God by the light of faith, for in most holy Mary these lower kinds of visions were incessant and continual, and superior to all visions of the saints during their earthly pilgrimage.

312. This abstractive vision of the Divinity, though not incompatible with her present condition on earth, was nevertheless so high and immediate that it could not well be continuous in her mortal state in which She was to merit the glory of intuitive vision by other acts; rather, it was a special favor to assist Her in attaining thereto, for it left in her soul the impression of the image of the Lord, and raised and consumed her whole being with a burning love of God. These affections were renewed continually during these visions in the most holy soul of Mary while She remained in the womb of St. Anne. Thus it happened that being in full possession of her intellectual faculties, and occupying Herself without intermission in prayer for the human race, in heroic acts of adoration, reverence, and love of God, and in communication with the Angels, She did not feel the narrowness and confinement of her natural prison, nor the restriction of her senses, nor the other restraints inseparable from such a state. To all this She gave no heed, living more in her Beloved than in the womb of her mother or in Herself.

313. The last of the three visions was accompanied by new and more wonderful favors of the Lord; it was given to prepare Her for her entrance into the world and for conversation with mortals. In accordance with the divine will the Princess of heaven said to the Lord: "Most high God, Lord of my being, soul of my life and life of my soul, infinite in thy attributes and perfections, incomprehensible, mighty, and rich in mercies, my King and Sovereign: Out of nothing hast Thou given me existence; without any merits of mine Thou hast enriched me with the treasures of thy divine light and grace, that by them I could instantly perceive thy immutable Being and divine perfections, and thus Thou wouldst be the first Object of my vision and love, not permitting me to seek any other good than Thee, who art the highest truth and all my consolation. Thou commandest me, my Lord, to issue forth and enter into the material light and converse with creatures. In thy own Being, whence all things are reflected as in a most perfect mirror, I have discerned the dangerous state and the miseries of mortal life. If due to my natural weakness and debility there is danger lest even in the least point I fail in thy love and service,

and if it is possible that I die here, let me die now before I pass into a state where I may lose Thee. But if thy holy will, my Lord and Master, is to be fulfilled, and I am to embark on the tempestuous sea of this world, I beseech Thee, most high and mighty God of my soul, to govern my life and direct my steps and all my actions toward pleasing Thee. Order in me holy love (Cant. 2:4), that in the new use which I am to make of creatures, and by thy aid, it may continue to grow. I have perceived in Thee the ingratitude of many souls, and as I am of their nature I fear with good reason that perhaps I may become guilty of the same fault. In this narrow cavity of my mother's womb I have enjoyed the infinite vastness of thy divinity; here I possessed all good, Thee thyself, my Beloved; and since here Thou alone art my portion and possession (Ps. 72:26), I know not whether outside of this enclosure I may lose it at the sight of the created light and in the use of my senses. If it were possible and appropriate to renounce the dealings of approaching life, I would gladly renounce and lose the experience of it; but let not my will but Thine be done. Therefore since Thou desirest it, confer upon me thy blessing and good will at my entrance into the world, and do not deprive me of thy divine protection during the earthly course in which Thou dost place me." Having thus poured forth her prayer, the most sweet child Mary received the benediction of the Most High and the command to issue forth into the light of the visible sun, at the same time being enlightened for the fulfillment of all his desires.

314. The most happy mother St. Anne passed the days of her pregnancy altogether spiritualized by the divine operations and the sweet workings of the Holy Ghost in all her faculties. Divine Providence, however, in order to direct her course to greater merit and reward, ordained that the ballast of trouble be not lacking, for without it the cargo of grace and love is scarcely ever secure. In order to understand better what happened to this holy woman it must be remembered that the demon, after he was hurled with the other bad angels from heaven into the infernal torments, never ceased during the reign of the ancient law to search through the earth, hovering with lurking vigilance above the women of distinguished holiness, in order to find Her whose sign he had seen (Apoc. 12:1) and whose heel was to bruise and crush his head (Gen. 3:15). The wrath of Lucifer against men was so fierce that he would not trust this investigation to his inferiors alone, but leaving them to operate against the virtuous women in general, he himself attended to this matter and assiduously hovered around those who signalized themselves more particularly in the exercise of virtue and in the grace of the Most High.

315. Filled with malice and astuteness he observed closely the exceedingly great holiness of the excellent matron Anne and all the events of her life, and although he could not estimate the richness of the Treasure which was enclosed in her blessed womb (since the Lord concealed this as well as many other mysteries from him), yet he felt a powerful influence proceeding from St. Anne. The fact that he could not penetrate into the source of this activity threw him at times into great fury and rage. At other times he quieted himself with the thought that this pregnancy arose from the same causes as others in the course of nature, and hence there was no special cause for alarm, for the Lord left him to his own hallucinations and to the vagaries of his own fury. Nevertheless the whole event was a source of great misgiving to this perverse spirit when he saw how quietly her pregnancy took its course, and especially when he saw that many Angels stood in attendance. Above all he was enraged at his weakness in resisting the force which proceeded from St. Anne, and he suspected that it was not she alone who was the cause of it.

316. Filled with this mistrust the dragon determined, if possible, to take the life of most blessed Anne, and if he could not succeed in this, at least try to obtain some wicked joy out of her pregnancy, for the pride of Lucifer was so boundless as to persuade him of his ability to overcome or take away the life of Her who was to be the Mother of the incarnate Word, or even

the life of the Messiah and Redeemer of the world, if only he could obtain knowledge of their whereabouts. His arrogance was founded upon the superiority of his angelic nature to the condition and power of mere human nature, as if both were not subject to grace and entirely dependent upon the will of their Creator. Audaciously therefore he set about tempting St. Anne with many suggestions, misgivings, doubts and hesitations about the truth of her pregnancy, alleging her protracted years. All this the demon attempted in order to test the virtue of the Saint, and to see whether these temptations would give some opening for the perversion of her will.

317. But the invincible matron resisted these onslaughts with humble fortitude, patience, continual prayer, and vivid faith in the Lord. She brought to naught the perplexing lies of the dragon, and because of them only gained additional grace and protection from on high, for besides the protection abundantly merited by her past life she was defended and freed from the demons by the great Princes who were guarding her most holy Daughter. Nevertheless in his insatiable malice the enemy did not desist on that account, and since his arrogance and pride far exceed his powers he sought human aid, for with such help he always promises himself greater ease of victory. Having at first tried to overthrow the dwelling of Sts. Joachim and Anne so she might be frightened and excited by the shock of its fall, but not being able to succeed due to the resistance of the holy Angels, he incited against St. Anne one of the foolish women of her acquaintance to quarrel with her. This the woman did with great fury, insolently attacking St. Anne with reproach and scorn. She did not hesitate to make a mockery of her pregnancy, saying that she was the sport of the demon in being thus found pregnant after so many years and at so great an age.

318. St. Anne was not disturbed by this temptation, but rather with all meekness and charity suffered the injuries and cherished those who dealt them. From that time on she looked upon these women with affection and lavished upon them greater benefits. But their wrath was not immediately pacified, for the demon had taken possession of them, filling them with hatred against the Saint; and since any concession to this cruel tyrant always increases his power over his victims, he incited these miserable dupes to even plot against the person and life of St. Anne. But they could not put their plots into execution because divine power interfered to foil their natural womanly weakness. They were not only powerless against the Saint, but they were overcome by her admonitions and brought to the knowledge and amendment of their evil course by her prayers.

319. The dragon was repulsed but not vanquished, for he immediately availed himself of a maid who served the saintly couple, and exasperated her against the holy matron. Through her he created an even greater annoyance than through the other women, for she was a domestic enemy and more stubborn and dangerous than the others. I will not stay to describe what the enemy attempted through this servant, since it was similar to that of the other woman, only more annoying and malicious. But with the help of God St. Anne won a more glorious victory than before, for the watcher of Israel slumbered not, but guarded his holy City (Ps. 120:4) and furnished it so well with sentinels, chosen from the strongest of his hosts, that they put to ignominious flight Lucifer and his followers. No more were they allowed to molest the fortunate mother, who was already expecting the birth of the most blessed Princess of heaven, and who, enriched by heroic acts of virtue and many merits in these conflicts, had now arrived at the fulfillment of all her highest desires. I too desire to come to an end with this chapter in order to hear the salutary instructions of my Mistress and Teacher, who besides assisting me in all that I write also favors me with her maternal admonitions which I receive with highest joy and exultation of my spirit.

320. Speak then, O Lady, and thy servant will listen. If Thou shalt permit, although I am but dust and ashes (Gen. 18:27), I will state a doubt which has occurred to me in this chapter; yet in all things I will remit myself to thy sweet benevolence as my Mother, Teacher and Mistress. The doubt in which I find myself is this: How was it possible that Thou, the Queen of all creation, conceived without sin and endowed with a soul exalted so high in the knowledge of all things by the visions of the Divinity, wast filled in spite of all these graces with so great a fear and anxiety of offending Him and losing the friendship of God? If in the first instant of thy existence Thou wast prevented by grace, how couldst Thou at that very instant fear to lose it? If the Most High exempted Thee from original sin, how couldst Thou fall into others, or fear to offend Him, who had preserved Thee from the first offense?

INSTRUCTION AND ANSWER OF THE QUEEN OF HEAVEN.

321. My daughter, hear the solution of thy difficulty. In the vision of the Divinity I instantaneously recognized my innocence and the stainlessness of my Immaculate Conception. These favors and benefits of the Almighty are of such a nature that the more they are understood and made secure, so much the more will they excite care and solicitude for their preservation and for the avoidance of any offense against their Author. They are given to his creatures out of pure goodness, and are accompanied with such clear intuition regarding their dependence on the merits of my most holy Son that the soul immediately centers its attention only on its own unworthiness and insufficiency, convinced it cannot merit them nor appropriate them to itself as being foreign to its nature. Since they are seen to belong to such a high Master, to whom they can revert to be distributed according to his pleasure, a most deeply felt solicitude fills the soul lest it lose what is thus freely given. The soul therefore begins to work with great diligence in order to preserve them and multiply the talent (Mt. 25:16), since it understands that to be the only means of keeping the deposit and fulfilling the object for which it was given, namely to make it bear fruit and contribute to the glory of the Creator. This care is precisely the condition necessary for the preservation of the benefits and graces received.

322. Besides this the soul is made to understand human frailty and freedom of the will for good or evil. Of this knowledge the Almighty did not deprive me, nor does He deprive anyone of it as long as he wanders through this life, but gives it to all according to measure, that by its guidance they may be filled with holy fear of falling into any fault, even the smallest. In me this light was greater, and I clearly saw that a small fault prepares the way for another, and that the second is only a punishment of the first. It is true that because of the blessings and graces of the Lord sin was impossible in me, but his providence so disposed of this knowledge that my absolute security from sin was hidden from me; I saw that as far as depended on myself alone I could fall, and that it was the divine will which preserved me. Thus He reserved to Himself his knowledge of my security from sin, and left me in solicitude and holy fear of sinning during my pilgrimage. From the instant of my Immaculate Conception until my death I never lost this fear, but on the contrary grew in it as my life progressed.

323. The Most High also gave me humility and discretion not to ask or to examine too closely this mystery, but solely to direct my attention toward increasing my confidence in his goodness with a view to obtaining his assistance against sin. Thence resulted those two necessary dispositions of a Christian life: The one, to maintain tranquility in the soul; the other, to not lose the fear and watchfulness in guarding my treasure. Since this latter was a filial fear it did not diminish love, but inflamed and increased it more and more. These two dispositions of love and

fear produced in my soul a perfect harmony with the divine will, governing all my actions so as to draw me away from evil and unite me with the highest Good.

324. This, my friend, is the great test of spiritual things, that they come with true enlightenment and sound doctrine, that they teach greater perfection of virtues and excite a strong impulse toward seeking it. This is the excellence of the benefits which descend from the Father of lights,* that they give assurance and confidence while making the soul humble, and encourage while exciting solicitude and watchfulness, though still preserving tranquility and peace in this solicitude, for all these effects are not incompatible in fulfilling the will of God. Do thou, O soul, offer humble and fervent thanksgiving to the Lord, because He has been so liberal with thee, though being so little obliged by thee, and has so greatly enlightened thee with divine light, breaking for thee the seal of his secret archives and yet filling thee with holy fear of his displeasure; however, make use of this fear with measure and strive instead to excel in love. Thus with these two wings raise thyself above the earth and above thyself, trying to rid thyself of the inordinate disturbance of excessive fear, and leave thy cause with the Lord and make his cause thy own. Let fear be with thee until thou art purified and cleansed of thy sins and of thy ignorance, but also love the Lord so thou mayest be transformed in Him, and set Him as the Master and the Arbiter of thy actions without desiring to be above any person. Do not trust thy own judgment, and be not wise in thy own conceit (Prov. 3:7), for the judgments of men are all too easily blinded by their passions, throwing them out of their course and drawing after them the will as their captive. Thus it comes that men fear what is not to be feared, and rejoice in that which is not profitable. Take heed lest thou be dissipated by every slight interior consolation, but hesitate and restrain thyself until thou findest with tranquil solicitude the proper measure in all things. This happy medium thou shalt always find if thou remain subject to thy superiors and willingly accept that which the Most High works in thee and teaches thee. Although thy undertakings may be good regarding the intentions, they must nevertheless also conform to the requirements of obedience and prudence, for without this guidance they are usually deformed and without any profitable result. Be thou therefore in all things solicitous about that which is most holy and perfect.

* cf. James 1:17 [Ed.]