

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 contemplation and divine love, 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 by which She exercised 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; in this manner contemplation was incessant and continual in most holy Mary above all the contemplation of all earthly pilgrims together.

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 by 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 entire 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 Lord: 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, so by them I could thenceforth know thy immutable Being and divine perfections, and thus Thou wouldst be the first Object of my vision and love so I would not 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 known as in a most clear mirror, I have seen the most dangerous state of mortal life and its miseries. If in them (due to my natural weakness and debility) I am to fail in a single point in thy love and service, and am to die therein, let me

first die here now before I pass into a state where I can lose Thee. But if thy holy will, my Lord and Master, must be fulfilled, and I am to embark on the tempestuous sea of this world, I beseech Thee, most high and powerful Good of my soul, to govern my life and direct my steps and all my actions to thy greater pleasure. Order charity in me (Cant. 2:4), so by the new use which I am to make of creatures, and by Thee, it may increase. I have known in Thee the ingratitude of many souls, and I fear with reason (for I am of their nature) that perhaps I shall commit the same fault. In this narrow cavity of the womb of my mother I have enjoyed the infinite spaces of thy divinity; here I possessed all good, which is Thee, my Beloved; and since here Thou alone art my portion and possession (Ps. 72:26), I know not whether outside of this enclosure I shall lose it at the sight of other light and in the use of my senses. If it is possible and appropriate to renounce the dealings of life which I expect, I am willing to renounce it entirely and lose the experience of it; but let not my will but Thine be done. Therefore since Thou dost desire it, give me thy blessing and good will in order to be born into the world, and do not remove from me thy divine protection in 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 wicked angels from heaven into the infernal torments, was always alert in lurking about, attending upon, and stalking all the women of greater holiness in the ancient law in order to find Her whose sign he had seen (Apoc. 12:1) and whose heel was to tread upon and crush his head (Gen. 3:15). And so ardent was this indignation of Lucifer that he would not trust these diligent searches to his inferiors alone, but leaving them to operate against the virtuous women in general he himself attended to this matter and encircled those whom he recognized as signaling themselves more particularly in the virtues and in the grace of the Most High.

315. Filled with malice and astuteness he observed closely the exceedingly great holiness of the great matron Anne and all the events of her life, and though 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 a little by judging that this pregnancy was of the same order and natural causes as the rest, and hence in this matter there was no new cause to fear, the Lord thus allowing him to deceive himself by his own ignorance and to proceed dizzied upon the proud waves of his own indignation. Yet along with all this his most perverse spirit was shocked upon witnessing the quietude of the pregnancy of St. Anne, and especially when he saw the assistance of many Angels. 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 the most happy Anne, and if he could not succeed in this, at least try to obtain some wicked satisfaction from her pregnancy, for the pride of Lucifer was so boundless as to persuade him of his ability to

conquer or take away the life of She who was to be the Mother of the incarnate Word, or even the life of the Messiah and Redeemer of the world Himself, if only he could ascertain 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 some lewd and weak women known by St. Anne to quarrel with her. This the women did with great anger, insolently attacking St. Anne with reproach and scorn. They did not hesitate to make a mockery of her pregnancy, saying 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 those despicable instruments to plot even against the person and life of St. Anne. But they could not execute this because divine power rendered the weak forces of those women even more feeble and inept, and they could accomplish nothing against the Saint; rather, she overcame them by her admonitions and converted them by her prayers to the knowledge and amendment of their lives.

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 women, 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 happy 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 defer to thy condescension as my Mother, Teacher and Lady. The doubt in which I find myself is this: How was it possible for Thee, 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, to be filled in spite of all these graces with such a great 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 sin?

INSTRUCTION AND ANSWER OF THE QUEEN OF HEAVEN.

321. My daughter, hear the answer to thy question. When in the vision I had of the Divinity, in the first instant I recognized my innocence, and that I had been conceived without sin. Such is the condition of these benefits and gifts from the hand of the Most High that the more they are understood and assure the soul, the greater care and attention they awaken in order to preserve them and not offend their Author, who by his goodness alone communicates them to the creature. They bring with them such light as can only be derived from virtue from on high and through the merits of my most holy Son; hence the soul more firmly realizes its own unworthiness and insufficiency, and by this understands very clearly that it receives what it has not merited, and originating outside itself it must not and cannot appropriate it to itself. Knowing these gifts come from such a superior Master and cause who generously grants them, it is likewise known He can take them away and redistribute them as He pleases. From this necessarily arises solicitude and care to avoid losing what it freely possesses, so the soul labors diligently in order to preserve them and augment the talent (Mt. 25:16), since it knows that to be the only means of not losing what it has on deposit, and that it was given to the creature so it may render the proper return and contribute to the glory of his Maker. This care is the precise condition necessary to preserve the benefits of grace received.

322. In addition to this the soul knows the frailty of human nature, and its free will for good or evil. This knowledge the Almighty did not take away from me, nor does He remove it from anyone living on earth, leaving it in all as appropriate so in his sight the holy fear of falling into sin, even the smallest, may take root. In me this light was greater, for I knew a small fault prepares the way for another greater one, and the second is a punishment of the first. It is true that the benefits and graces which the Lord operated in my soul made it impossible for me to fall into sin; yet his providence so arranged this benefit that my absolute security from sin was hidden from me. I knew that as far as depended upon me alone it was possible for me to fall, and that my not doing so was solely dependent upon the divine will. Thus He reserved to Himself the knowledge of my security from sin, and left me in solicitude and holy fear of sinning as a viator; and from my 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 the discretion and humility not to ask about or examine this mystery, but only to attend to trusting in his goodness and love which would assist me not to sin. From this resulted two dispositions necessary for a Christian life: One, to maintain tranquility in the soul, and the other to not lose the fear and watchfulness in guarding my treasure. And since this was a filial fear it did not diminish love, but instead inflamed and increased it more and

more. These two dispositions of love and fear produced in my soul a heavenly harmony in ordering all my actions toward moving away from sin and uniting myself with the highest Good.

324. My friend, this is the great test of spiritual things, that they come with true light and sound doctrine, that they teach greater perfection of virtues and with great force move the soul to seek it. The benefits which descend from the Father of lights* have these characteristics: They secure humility, humbling the soul without discouragement; and they give confidence with carefulness and watchfulness, and solicitude with tranquility and peace, for these effects do not hinder the fulfillment of the divine will. And thou, soul, offer humble and fervent thanksgiving to the Lord because He has been so generous with thee, though being so little obliged by thee, and has enlightened thee with his divine light, opening up the archive of his secrets and forestalling thee with the fear of his disgrace. While making use of this fear with measure, excel more in love; and with these two wings raise thyself above all that is earthly and above thyself. Then seek to rid thyself of any disordered affection which moves thee to excessive fear, leaving thy cause to the Lord and taking his cause as thy own. Fear until thou art purified and cleansed of thy sins and ignorance; love the Lord until thou art entirely transformed in Him. In all things make Him the Master and Arbiter of thy actions, without thou being so in anything. Do not trust thy own judgment, and *be not wise in thy own conceit* (Prov. 3:7), since passions easily blind personal opinion and draw the judgment after them, and such opinions and passions snatch the will as their captive; in this way the soul comes to fear what should not be feared, and exult in that which is not proper. Make sure not to dwell upon frivolous interior whim; doubt thy own preference in fear until with tranquil solicitude thou findest the proper medium in all things. This thou shalt always find if thou art subject to thy superiors and to what the Most High works in thee and teaches thee. And though thy intentions be good regarding the desired end, all must be undertaken under obedience and counsel, for without this guidance they usually turn out deformed and without profit. In all thy doings be attentive to what is most holy and perfect.

* cf. James 1:17 [Ed.]