

CHAPTER XXII

Celebrating the Espousal of Most Holy Mary with the Holy and Most Chaste Joseph.

752. On the day on which, as we have said in the preceding chapter, our Princess Mary completed the fourteenth year of her life, the men who at that time were in the city of Jerusalem and were descendants of the tribe of Juda and the race of David gathered together in the temple. The sovereign Lady was also of that lineage. Among the number was Joseph, a native of Nazareth then living in Jerusalem, for he was one of the descendants of the royal race of David. He was then thirty-three years of age, of handsome person and pleasing countenance, but also of incomparable modesty and gravity. Above all he was most chaste in thought and conduct, and most saintly in all his inclinations. From his twelfth year he had made and kept the vow of chastity. He was related to the Virgin Mary in the third degree, and was known for the utmost purity of his life, holy and irreprehensible in the eyes of God and men.

753. All these unmarried men gathered in the temple and prayed to the Lord conjointly with the priests in order to be governed by the Holy Ghost in what they were about to do. The Most High spoke to the heart of the high priest, inspiring him to place into the hands of each one of the young men a dry stick, with the command that each ask His Majesty with a lively faith to single out the one whom He had chosen as the spouse of Mary. And since the sweet odor of her virtue and nobility, the fame of her beauty, her possessions and her modesty, and her position as being the firstborn in her family were known to all of them, each one coveted the happiness of meriting Her as a spouse. Among them all only the humble and most upright Joseph thought himself unworthy of such a great blessing, and remembering the vow of chastity which he had made, and resolving anew its perpetual observance, he resigned himself to the will of God, leaving it all to his disposal and being filled at the same time with a veneration and esteem greater than any of the others for the most noble maiden Mary.

754. While they were thus engaged in prayer the staff which Joseph held was seen to blossom, and at the same time a dove of purest white and resplendent with admirable light was seen to descend and rest upon the head of the Saint, while in the interior of his heart God spoke to him: "Joseph, my servant, Mary shall be thy Spouse; accept Her with attention and reverence, for She is acceptable in my eyes, just and most pure in soul and body, and thou shalt do all that She shall say to thee." By this declaration and sign from heaven the priests declared St. Joseph as the spouse selected by God himself for the maiden Mary. Calling Her forth for her espousal, the chosen One issued forth like the sun, more resplendent than the moon (Cant. 6:9), and She entered into the presence of all with a countenance more beautiful than that of an angel, incomparable in the charm of her beauty, nobility and grace, and the priests espoused Her to the most chaste and holy of men, St. Joseph.

755. The heavenly Princess, more pure than the stars of the firmament, with a tearful and serious countenance, and as the Queen of most humble majesty uniting all these perfections, took leave of the priests, asking their blessing, and also that of her instructress, and begging pardon from the other maidens of the temple, giving thanks to all of them for the blessings received at their hands in the temple. All this She expressed partly by her most humble countenance, and partly by very brief and most humble reasonings, for on all occasions She spoke few and weighty words. She took leave of the temple not without great sorrow in leaving it contrary to her inclination and desire. Accompanied by some of the more distinguished laity who served the temple in temporal matters, She went with her spouse Joseph to Nazareth, the native city of the

two most fortunate spouses. Although he had been born in that place, he had by the providential disposition of circumstances decided to live for some time in Jerusalem. Thus it happened that he so improved his fortune as to become the spouse of Her whom God had chosen to be his own Mother.

756. Having arrived at their home in Nazareth, where the Princess of heaven had inherited the possessions and estates of her blessed parents, they were welcomed and visited by their friends and relatives with the joyful congratulations customary on such occasions. After they had in a most holy manner complied with the natural duties of friendship and politeness, and satisfied the worldly obligations connected with the conversation and interaction with their fellowmen, the two most holy spouses Joseph and Mary were left free and unoccupied in their house. The custom had been introduced among the Hebrews that for the first few days of their married state the husband and wife would enter upon a sort of study or trial of each others' habits and temperament, so afterwards they would be able to make reciprocal allowance in their conduct toward each other.

757. During this time St. Joseph said to his spouse Mary: "My spouse and Lady, I give thanks to God the Most High for the favor of having designated me as thy spouse without my merits when I judged myself unworthy of thy company; yet His Majesty, who can raise up the poor whenever He desires, showed this mercy to me, and since I hope in thy discretion and virtue I desire Thee to help me give the return I owe Him, serving Him with an upright heart. For this Thou hast me as thy servant, and by the true affection with which I esteem thee I beg of thee to supply for my deficiencies in the fulfillment of the domestic duties and of other matters which as thy spouse I should know how to perform. Tell me, Lady, what is thy will that I may fulfill it."

758. The heavenly Spouse heard these words with a humble Heart, and yet also with a serene earnestness, and She answered the Saint: "My master, I am joyful that the Most High, in order to place me in this state of life, has deigned to choose thee for my spouse, and has given me the testimony of his divine will that I serve thee; yet if thou givest me permission I shall speak of my intentions and thoughts which regarding this I desire to manifest to thee." The Most High forestalled the sincere and upright heart of St. Joseph with his grace and inflamed it anew with divine love through the words of most holy Mary, and he answered Her saying: "Speak, Lady, for thy servant hears." On this occasion the Mistress of the world was surrounded by the thousand Angels of her guard in visible form. She had asked them to be present in that manner because the Lord, so the most pure Virgin could act with greater grace and merit, had permitted Her to feel the respect and reverence with which She was bound to speak to her husband, and left Her to the natural shyness and dread which She always felt in speaking to men alone, which She had never done until this day, except perhaps by accident with the high priest.

759. The holy Angels obeyed their Queen, and visible only to Her stood in attendance. In this glorious company She spoke to her spouse St. Joseph and said to him: "My master and spouse, it is just that we give praise and glory with all reverence to our God and Creator, who in goodness is infinite, in his judgments incomprehensible, and to we who are poor He has manifested his greatness and mercy, choosing us for his service. I acknowledge myself among all creatures as more obliged and indebted to His Highness than any other, and more than all of them together, for meriting less I have received from his most liberal hand more than they. At a tender age, being compelled thereto by the force of this truth which the divine light communicated to me along with detachment from all that is visible, I consecrated myself to God by a perpetual vow to be chaste in soul and body; I am his, and I acknowledge Him as my Spouse and Master, with an unchangeable will to preserve for Him the integrity of chastity. In order to fulfill this vow I

desire thee, my master, to help me, while in all the rest I shall be thy faithful servant in caring for thy life as long as mine shall last. Accept, my spouse, this holy resolve, and conform it to yours, so offering ourselves as an acceptable sacrifice to our eternal God, He may receive us in the odor of sweetness and bestow upon us the eternal goods for which we hope.”

760. The most chaste spouse Joseph, full of interior joy at the words of his heavenly Spouse, answered Her: “My Lady, in declaring to me thy chaste thoughts and resolves Thou hast penetrated and opened my heart. I have not manifested to Thee my resolves before knowing thine. I also acknowledge myself under greater obligation to the Lord of creation than other men, since very early He has called me by his true light so I could love Him with an upright heart. And I desire Thee to know, O Lady, that at the age of twelve years I also made a promise to serve the Most High in perpetual chastity; and I now renew and ratify this same vow in order not to impede thy own. Therefore in the presence of His Highness I promise to help Thee, as far as in me lies, to serve and love Him in all purity according to thy desire. With the help of divine grace I shall be thy most faithful servant and companion, and I beseech Thee to receive my chaste affection and accept me as thy brother, without ever admitting any other kind of love outside that which Thou owest to God, and after God to me.” In this conversation the Most High confirmed anew the virtue of chastity in the heart of St. Joseph and the pure and holy love due to his most holy spouse Mary. This love the Saint already had in an eminent degree, and the Lady herself by her most prudent conversation augmented it sweetly, lifting up his heart.

761. By divine operation the two most holy and chaste Spouses felt an incomparable joy and consolation. The heavenly Princess, as one who is the Mistress of all virtues, and who in all things pursued the highest perfection of all virtues, lovingly corresponded to the desires of St. Joseph. The Most High also gave to St. Joseph new purity and complete command over his natural inclinations, so without hindrance or any trace of sensual desires, but with admirable and new grace, he could serve his spouse Mary, and by Her execute the will and pleasure of the Lord. They immediately set about dividing the property inherited from Sts. Joachim and Anne, the parents of the most holy Virgin. One part they offered to the temple where She had stayed, another they destined for the poor, and the third was left in the hands of the holy spouse St. Joseph to be disposed of according to his judgment. Our Queen reserved for Herself only the privilege of serving him and attending to the household duties, for the most prudent Virgin always kept Herself aloof from communication with outsiders and from the management of property, buying or selling, as I mentioned before (552, 553).

762. In his earlier years St. Joseph had learned the trade of carpentering as being a respectable and proper way of earning sustenance in life. He was poor in earthly possessions, as I have said above. He therefore asked his most holy Spouse whether it was agreeable to Her that he exercise his trade in order to be able to serve Her and to gain something for distribution among the poor, since it was necessary to do some work and not remain idle. The most prudent Virgin approved of this resolve, saying the Lord did not desire them to be rich, but poor and lovers of the poor, desirous of helping them insofar as their means would allow. Then arose between the two Spouses a holy contest of who would obey the other as superior. But She, who among the humble was the most humble, won in this contest of humility, for as the man is the head of the family She would not permit this natural order to be inverted. She desired in all things to obey her spouse St. Joseph, asking him only for permission to help the poor, which the Saint gladly gave.

763. As St. Joseph during these days by divine enlightenment learned to know more and more the qualities of his spouse Mary, her rare prudence, humility, purity, and all her other virtues

exceeding by far his thoughts and estimates, he was seized with ever new admiration, and in great joy of spirit continued to praise and thank the Lord again and again for having given him a companion and Spouse so far above his merits. And so this work of the Most High would be entirely perfect (for it was the beginning of the greatest which He was to execute by his omnipotence) He ordained that the Princess of heaven, by her mere presence and conversation, would infuse into the heart of her spouse a holy fear and reverence greater than words could ever suffice to describe. This effect was wrought upon St. Joseph by an effulgence or reflection of the divine light which shone from the face of our Queen and which was mingled with an ineffable and always visible majesty, and with such greater cause than with Moses descending from the mountain (Ex. 34:30) since her interaction and conversation with God had been more extended and intimate.

764. Soon thereafter most holy Mary had a divine vision of the Lord in which His Majesty spoke to Her, saying: "My most beloved Spouse and chosen One, behold how I am faithful in my words with those who love and fear Me. Now therefore correspond to my fidelity by keeping all the laws of my Spouse in sanctity, purity, and all perfection; for this the company of my servant Joseph whom I have given Thee shall help Thee. Obey him as Thou must, and attend to his counsel, for this is my will." Most holy Mary responded: "Most high Lord, I praise and magnify Thee for thy admirable counsel and providence with me, an unworthy and poor creature. My desire is to obey Thee and please Thee as thy servant, more obligated to Thee than any other creature. Bestow upon me, my Lord, thy divine favor, so in all things I may be assisted and governed according to thy greater pleasure, and also so I may attend to the duties of the state in which Thou hast placed me, as thy slave never straying from thy commands and approbation. Give me thy permission and blessing, so with it I properly obey and serve thy servant Joseph as Thou, my Master and Maker, hast commanded me."

765. Upon these divine supports the home and married life of most holy Mary and St. Joseph were founded. From the eighth of September, when they were espoused, until the twenty-fifth of March following, when the Incarnation of the divine Word took place (as I will say in the second Part [*Inc.* 138]), the two Spouses thus lived together, the Most High preparing them respectively for the work for which they had been chosen. The heavenly Lady then put in order her personal belongings and those of her household, as I shall relate in the following chapters.

766. But I cannot at this juncture withhold my affection in congratulating St. Joseph, the most happy among men, on his good fortune. Whence is it, O man of God, that among all the sons of Adam thou hast the happiness and good fortune of possessing God himself in such a manner that He conducted Himself and was reputed as thy only Son? At its proper time the eternal Father gives to thee his Son, the Son gives to thee his real and true Mother, and the Holy Ghost yields and entrusts to thee his Spouse, while the entire blessed Trinity concedes and entrusts to thee as thy legitimate Spouse his only and chosen One, elect as the sun. Dost thou realize, O Saint, thy dignity? Dost thou know thy excellence? Dost thou understand thy Spouse is the Queen and Lady of heaven and earth, and thou art the depository of the inestimable treasures of God himself? Be mindful, O man of God, of thy entrusted pledge, and know that if thou art not envied by the Angels and Seraphim, thou hast them in admiration and suspense at thy good fortune and the sacrament contained within thy matrimony. Receive the congratulations for such great happiness in the name of the whole human race. Thou art the archive of the history of the divine mercies, the master and spouse of She who is inferior only to God himself. Thou findest thyself enriched and prosperous in the sight of all men and of the Angels themselves. Remember our

poverty and misery, and remember me, the most vile worm of the earth, for I desire to be thy client, blessed and favored by thy powerful intercession.

INSTRUCTION OF THE QUEEN OF HEAVEN.

767. My daughter, by the example of my life in the state of matrimony in which the Most High placed me thou shalt find a refutation for those souls who allege their life in the world as an excuse for not being perfect. For God nothing is impossible, and likewise for those who with living faith hope in Him, and submit themselves entirely to his divine disposition. I lived in the house of my spouse with the same perfection as in the temple, for in changing my state of life I altered neither the affection nor the desire and solicitude to love and serve God, but rather increased it so nothing would hinder me in the obligations of a spouse. For this reason I was further assisted by the divine favor, and his powerful hand disposed and accommodated all things according to my desire. The Lord will do the same for all men if on their part they correspond with Him; yet they blame the state of matrimony, deceiving themselves, since the hindrance to being holy and perfect is not in the state but in the vain and superfluous cares and solicitude to which they submit themselves, forgetting the pleasure of the Lord, and seeking and preferring their own.

768. And if there is no excuse for not pursuing the perfection of virtue in the world, even less will the duties and occupations of the religious state be accepted as an excuse, for thou must never imagine thyself hindered from this because thou art an abbess. Since God has placed thee in this duty by the hand of obedience, thou must not mistrust his assistance and protection; for on the same day He placed thee in this office He took it upon Himself to give thee strength and help so thou mayest attend to the obligation of a superior, and in particular the perfection with which thou must love thy Lord and God. Oblige Him by the sacrifice of thy own will, patiently humbling thyself in all things which his divine Providence ordains; and if thou dost not hinder his will I assure thee of his protection, and by experience thou shalt always know the power of his arm in governing thee and perfectly directing all thy actions.