

CHAPTER XXIV

Continuing the Same Subject with the Rest of the Explanation of Chapter XXXI of the Proverbs.

783. No quality of a valiant woman could be lacking in our Queen, for She was the fountain of virtue and of grace. *She hath considered a field* (continues the text [Prov. 31:16]), *and bought it; with the fruit of her hands She hath planted a vineyard.* The field of highest perfection, where the abundant and fragrant fruits of virtue are raised, was the one which most holy Mary considered; and as She was considering and weighing it by the clearness of the divine light, She recognized the treasure which was buried in it. In order to buy this field She exchanged for it her property rights in all the earth, of which She was truly the Queen and Lady, preferring the possession of this field to all other things, and abdicating in favor of it the use and right of all her possessions. This Lady alone could dispose of all creation, for She alone had the full possession of it, and She alone could buy the whole field of sanctity; She alone could examine and estimate its full value, and She alone, next to God, appropriated to Herself the field of the Divinity and his attributes, while the other saints could appropriate only a part. *With the fruit of her hands She hath planted a vineyard.* She planted the holy Church, not only by giving us her most holy Son to form and constitute it, but by being Herself his Coadjutrix, and after his Ascension remaining on earth as the Teacher of the Church, as will be related in the third Part of this History. She planted the vineyard of the paradise which that fierce beast Lucifer had ruined and devastated, thus restoring it to fruitfulness by her solicitude. She planted the vineyard of her most spacious and magnanimous Heart, setting in it the sprouts of virtue and the most fertile vines from which Christ in the winepress of the Cross distilled the most sweet wine of his love to inebriate his beloved and nourish his friends (Cant. 5:1).

784. *She hath girded her loins with strength, and hath strengthened her arm* (Prov. 31:17). The greatest strength of those who call themselves strong is in their arm, with which they perform hard and difficult works, and the most difficult work of earthly men consists in restricting their passions and inclinations and subjecting them to reason; therefore the sacred text says of this valiant Woman that She both girds her loins and strengthens her arm. Our Queen was subject to no passions or disorderly inclinations which She would have to suppress in her most innocent person, but this did not hinder Her from being more courageous in restricting Herself than all the children of Adam, whose interior is thrown into disorder by the consequences of sin. Without having need thereof her virtues and her love urged Her to practice greater mortification than the most wicked inclinations could ever have required. None of those infected by sin and bound to satisfy for it ever exerted such strength in mortifying their disorderly passions as our Princess Mary exerted in governing and mortifying more and more all her faculties and senses. She chastised her most innocent and virginal body by incessant penances, watchings, fasts, and prostrations in the form of a cross, as we shall say later on (*Inc.* 12, 232, 658; *Tran.* 187, 279-80; *Cor.* 581). She denied to her senses all rest and indulgence, not because they were in disorder, but in order to continually perform what was most holy and acceptable before God, never being weak, remiss, or negligent, because all her works were wrought with the entire efficacy and strength of grace.

785. *She hath tasted and seen that her traffic is good; her lamp shall not be put out in the night* (Prov. 31:18). The Lord is so kind and faithful with creatures that when He commands us to gird ourselves with mortification and penance, since *the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence* (Mt. 11:12) and must be gained by force, because of this violence to our inclinations He rewards our

efforts with a joy and consolation that fill our hearts with delight. By this joy we know how good is this exchange of the highest Good for those works of mortification by which we restrain our hankering after temporal pleasures, for as a prepayment we receive the joys of the Christian truth, and in it a pledge of eternal life; and the more we engage in this kind of commerce, the more we will gain and the greater will be our esteem for it.

786. If we who are subject to sin experience this truth, how much more intimately did most holy Mary understand and appreciate it? And if in us, in whom the night of sin is so dense and persistent, the divine light of grace can be preserved by means of penance and mortification of our passions, how must this light have burned in the Heart of that most pure creature? She was not oppressed by the infection of our gross and corrupted nature; She had not been scorched by the tinder of disobedience; She was not stung by the reproaches of a bad conscience, nor by the fear of having experienced sin; and besides all this She was enlightened beyond all the conception of angels or men. She understood well and enjoyed this kind of commerce without extinguishing the illuminating lamp of the Lamb (Apoc. 21:23) in the troubles and dangers of this life.

787. *She hath put out her hand to strong things, and her fingers have taken hold of the spindle* (Prov. 31:19). The valiant Woman, who with the exertion and labor of her hands increases her virtues and the goods of her family, who girds Herself with fortitude against her passions, who recognizes the delights of the commerce of virtue, could well extend and reach out her hand toward great things. Most holy Mary did this unhindered by her state and its obligations, for elevating Herself above Herself and above all earthly things She extended her desires and works to what was the greatest and strongest in divine love and the knowledge of God, rising above all human and angelic nature. And since by her espousal She approached nearer and nearer to the dignity and office of Mother, She continued to expand her Heart, extending her arm to her saintly works until She fitted Herself to cooperate in the most arduous and sublime work of the divine omnipotence, namely the Incarnation of the Word. Of all this I will say more in the second Part when explaining the preparation of our Queen for this great mystery (*Inc.* 1-106). And because the mere resolve or determination to do great things without their fulfillment is futile and of no practical consequence, therefore it is said *and her fingers have taken hold of the spindle*, which means our Queen really executed all the great, arduous and difficult works exactly as She had intended and proposed in her most well-ordered mind. In all things She was found true and far from the exaggeration and mere outward show of a woman who carries the distaff at her belt but does not take hold of the spindle. Therefore it is added:

788. *She hath opened her hand to the needy, and stretched out her hand to the poor* (Prov. 31:20). The prudent woman and housewife shows great courage in being generous with the poor, never yielding to weakness of mind or cowardly diffidence, or fearing that because of her alms her family would suffer, since the most powerful means of increasing all possessions is to part with them generously for the poor of Christ, who even in this life knows how to give a hundredfold in return (Mk. 10:30). Most holy Mary distributed to the poor and to the temple the inheritance of her parents, as I said above (761); in addition She gave the labor of her hands to assist in the works of mercy, for without contributing her personal exertion and labor She could not have satisfied her pious and generous love of the poor. It is no wonder the avaricious world of today experiences want and poverty in temporal things, since men have become so deficient in kindness and pity for the poor; they use that which God created for the sustenance of the needy and the salvation of the rich only for satisfying their vanities.

789. Our most kind Queen and Lady, however, extended not only her own hands to the poor, She also drew forth the hands of the powerful arms of the omnipotent God, for as yet He had not extended the helping hand of his divine Word toward mortals, who did not merit such a favor, or rather who were making themselves unworthy of it. This valiant Woman gave Him hands, hands extended and opened for the benefit of us poor captives afflicted by the misery of sin. Because this neediness and poverty was the lot of all men, Scripture uses the word *poor* in the singular, for the entire human race was like one poor person, no more capable of providing for itself than if all men had been only one single poor person. The hands of Christ our Lord, extended for our Redemption and opened for the distribution of his gifts and merits, were most holy Mary's own hands, for they were the hands of her Son, and because without Her the poor human race would never have seen them opened for its relief; and they were also her hands by many other titles.

790. *She shall not fear for her house in the cold of snow; for all her domestics are clothed in double garments* (Prov. 31:21). Having lost the Sun of justice, the warmth of grace, and original justice, our nature was buried under the frozen snow of sin, with all its power for doing good restricted, impeded and congealed. Thence arise the difficulties in the performance of holy works, the slowness of our actions, our inattention and negligence, our instability, and numerous other defects in the practice of virtue; thence it comes that we find ourselves, after the commission of sin, deprived of the love of God, without shelter or covering against temptations. Our heavenly Queen was free from all these impediments and defects in body and soul, for all her domestics, that is her interior and exterior faculties, were sheltered from the frost of sin by double vestments. To begin with She was protected by original justice and the infused virtues, together with the virtues acquired by her own exertions from the first moment of her activity; moreover, She was protected by the double vestment of the common graces which She received on her own account and those which She received in a special manner due to her dignity as Mother of God. I shall not detain myself in describing her provident care for her own household, for while in other women the care which they bestow in this matter may be praiseworthy because it is necessary, in the house of the Queen of heaven and earth, most holy Mary, it was not necessary to multiply the garments; not for her Son, since He possessed but one, and neither for Herself nor for her spouse Joseph, since their poverty was their greatest adornment and shelter.

791. *She hath made for herself clothing of tapestry; fine linen and purple is her covering* (Ib. 22). This metaphor likewise indicates the spiritual adornments of this Woman. It was a garment variegated and strong, serving as a complete covering and defending Her from the inclemencies and rigors of the rainfall, for this is the purpose for which strong blankets, raincoats and the like are woven. The long cloak of virtues and gifts of Mary was impenetrable to the powerful streams of temptation and assault which the great red and sanguinary dragon poured out against Her and which St. John saw in the Apocalypse (Apoc. 12:15). Greater than the strength of this vestment was the beauty and variety of her virtues, woven into it and not merely apparent, for they had, so to say, become part of her flesh and blood and the substance of her nature from the very moment in which She obtained her existence in grace and original justice. In Her were the purple of charity, the white of chastity and purity, the celestial blue of hope, with all the other variety of gifts and graces which entirely clothed and adorned Her in all their beauty. Mary was also adorned with white and scarlet, which the Spouse understood as representing the divinity and humanity of her Spouse, and which She gives as his signs (Cant. 5:10); for since She gave to the Word the scarlet of his most holy humanity, He in return gave Her the splendor of the Divinity, not only uniting both these natures in her virginal womb, but leaving in his Mother emanations and rays of the Divinity more excellent than in all the other creatures together.

792. *Her husband is honorable in the gates, when he sitteth among the senators of the land* (Prov. 31:23). Just as in olden times when judgment was held under the city gates, so at the portals of eternal life judgment is pronounced separately over each one, whereas on the last day we are to expect the General Judgment of the whole world. In the universal judgment St. Joseph, one of the two men of most holy Mary, will take his seat among the nobility of the kingdom of God, for he will sit in judgment with the Apostles over the world,* enjoying this privilege as the spouse of the valiant Woman and Queen of all, and as the putative father of the supreme Judge. The other Man of this Lady is her Son, as I have already said (774), and He is acknowledged and recognized as the supreme Lord and true Judge both in the particular judgment and in that which is to be held over the angels and all men. This supreme power devolves in part also upon most holy Mary, for it was She who gave Him the flesh in which He redeemed the world.

793. *She made fine linen, and sold it, and delivered a girdle to the Chanaanite* (Prov. 31:24). In this solicitous labor of the valiant Woman two excellences of our great Queen are pointed out. First, She made a linen so pure, so spacious and large, that the eternal Word, though He had to constrain and limit his greatness, could descend and clothe Himself in it, and She sold it to no one else than the Lord himself, who gave Her in return his own Son; for there was nothing in all creation which was of sufficient price to buy this linen sheet of the purity and sanctity of Mary, nor could any man merit to be her son except the Son of God himself. Second, She most graciously gave, not sold, a cincture to the Chanaanite, cursed by his father (Gen. 9:25); for all those who participated in the first malediction and were despoiled and subjected to disorderly appetites and inclinations could now gird themselves anew by the cincture which most holy Mary procured for them through her firstborn and onlybegotten Son and through the law of grace, thereby allowing them to reform themselves and gird themselves with new strength. No excuse remains for the foreknown and the damned, angels and men, since all of them had the means to restrain themselves against their disorderly passions equally with the predestined, for they could have availed themselves of the graces gratuitously obtained for them by most holy Mary, and no payment was required for them.

794. *Strength and beauty are her clothing, and she shall laugh in the latter day* (Prov. 31:25). Strength and beauty are another new adornment and vestment of the valiant Woman. Strength makes Her invincible in suffering and in operating against the infernal powers; beauty gives Her exterior grace and admirable decorum in all her actions. Because of these two prerogatives our Queen was amiable in the eyes of God, of the angels, and of the world. She was not only free from all reprehension of sin and defect, but She possessed that double grace and beauty which pleased and charmed so much the Spouse when He said She was entirely beautiful and pleasing to Him (Cant. 4:1, 7). And where there is no fault to be deplored there also is no cause of mourning on the last day, when no mortal shall be without such cause except this our Lady and her most holy Son. All others were tainted with some defect for which they must grieve, and on that day the damned will weep for not having properly wept over their sins before. On that day this valiant Woman shall be full of delight and joy, returning thanks for her own incomparable happiness as well as for the execution of divine justice against the wicked and rebellious by her most holy Son.†

795. *She hath opened her mouth to wisdom, and the law of clemency is on her tongue* (Prov. 31:26). This great excellency of the valiant Woman is not to open her mouth for anything except

* cf. Mt. 19:28; I Cor. 6:2; Wis. 3:8; *Introit*, Vigil of All Saints (Oct. 31) [Ed.]

† cf. Mt. 5:6 [Ed.]

to teach the fear of the Lord or to pursue some work of clemency. This our Queen and Lady fulfilled in the highest perfection. She opened her mouth as the Teacher of divine wisdom when She said to the holy Archangel: *Fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum* (Lk. 1:38); and whenever She spoke it was as the most prudent Virgin and as one filled with the knowledge of the Most High, as a Teacher to all, and as one interceding for the miserable children of Eve. The law of clemency always was and shall be on her lips as a most kind Mother of Mercy, since only her intercession and word is an inviolable law upon which depends our remedy in all necessities if we know how to oblige Her to open her mouth and move her tongue to intercede for us.

796. *She hath looked well to the paths of her house, and hath not eaten her bread idle* (Prov. 31:27). It is no small honor for the mother of a family to keep a strict watch over all the ways of augmenting most unfailingly its property and happiness; but in this divine prudence only Mary gave an altogether perfect example to mortals. She alone knew how to investigate and search all the ways of justice and find the straight roads by which with greater security and speed the Divinity can be reached. She attained to this knowledge so expeditiously that She outstripped all mortals, and even the Cherubim and Seraphim themselves. She recognized and detected good and evil, the height and the depth of sanctity, the extent of human weakness, the astuteness of our enemies, and the dangers infesting the world and all that is terrestrial. At the same time She put all her knowledge into practice, never eating her bread idle, and receiving neither her soul nor divine grace in vain (Ps. 23:4); and thus She merited what follows.

797. *Her children rose up, and called her blessed; her husband, and he praised her* (Prov. 31:28). Great and glorious things have the true sons of this Woman said of Her in the Church Militant,* calling Her most blessed among women; and let those who have not risen up and proclaimed Her blessed not consider themselves her children, nor learned, nor wise, nor devout. Yet though all the saints of the Church have spoken, being inspired and moved by her Man and Spouse, Christ and the Holy Ghost, nevertheless it seems until now He has kept quiet and has not risen to publish the many and exalted sacraments concerning his most holy Mother which have been hidden; they are such that I was given to understand the Lord has reserved them in order to manifest them in the Church Triumphant after the Universal Judgment, since it is not proper to manifest them to the unworthy world, incapable of such wonders. There Christ, the Man of Mary, shall declare the prerogatives and excellences of that Lady in order to manifest his and her glory, and for the joy of the saints; there shall we know them in full. Here it is sufficient for us to reverently recognize them under the veil of faith, and to live now in the hope of fully understanding these great blessings in the future life.

798. *Many daughters have gathered together riches; thou hast surpassed them all* (Ib. 29). All the souls who have come to the attainment of the grace of the Most High are called his daughters, and all the merits, gifts and graces which they gained or could gain are true riches, for earthly possessions have unjustly usurped the name of riches. Great will be the number of the predestined; He who has enumerated the stars by their names knows it (Ps. 146:4). Yet Mary alone has gathered more riches than all who are children of Adam and of Herself; She alone attained such a position not only to be called their Mother and they her children, but She became the Mother of God himself, for in this She far surpasses all the glory the entire number of the predestined ever possessed or will possess. And because in comparison with these riches and gifts of interior grace and their corresponding glory the exterior and apparent outward

* cf. Ps. 86:3 [Ed.]

appearance of women, which is held in such high esteem by them, is but vanity, Solomon adds and says:

799. *Favor is deceitful and beauty is vain; the woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates* (Prov. 31:30-31). The world falsely esteems as graceful many things that are not so, and have no more of beauty and grace in them than what they derive from the erroneous judgment of the ignorant, for example the outward appearance of virtue in our works, the pleasure excited by sweet and eloquent words, wit and elegance in our speech or behavior, the benevolence of superiors, or popularity. All this is deceitful and fallacious, no less than the beauty of a woman, which vanishes in such a short time. She who fears God and teaches others to fear Him merits truly the praise of men and of the Lord himself. And because God himself wishes to praise Her, Scripture says: *Give her of the fruit of her hands*. He refers her praise to her great works done in public in the sight of all so these very works announce her praise, since the praise of men matters little to the woman whose own works condemn her. Hence the Most High desires the works of his most holy Mother to become manifest in the gates of his holy Church insofar as is now possible and opportune, and as I said above (797) reserving her greater glory and praise to remain permanently in the Church Triumphant forever and ever. Amen.

INSTRUCTION OF THE QUEEN OF HEAVEN.

800. My daughter, thou hast great instruction for thy governance in this chapter; and though thou hast not written all it contains, yet I desire thee to write in thy inmost heart what thou hast declared as well as what remains hidden, and as an inviolable law execute it in thyself. For this purpose it is necessary for thee to live withdrawn within thy interior, forgetful of all visible and earthly things, and most attentive to the divine light which assists thee and defends all thy faculties with double vestments, so thou feelest neither cold nor lukewarm on the way of perfection, and also resist the unbridled movements of the passions. Gird them and mortify them by the cincture of the fear of God, and detached from what is apparent and deceitful raise thy mind to consider and understand the ways of thy interior, and the paths which God has shown thee for seeking Him in thy interior retreat, and finding Him without danger of error. Having tasted the interaction with heaven, do not allow thy carelessness to extinguish in thy mind the divine light which enkindles and illumines thee in the darkness. Eat not thy bread in idleness, but labor without giving rest to solicitude, and then thou shalt eat of the fruit of thy diligence. Strengthened in the Lord thou shalt perform works worthy of his acceptance and pleasure, and thou shalt run after the odor of his ointments* until thou dost come to possess Him eternally. Amen.

END OF BOOK TWO

END OF PART I

* cf. Cant. 1:3 [Ed.]