

CHAPTER XIII

Most Holy Mary Reaches Thirty-Three Years of Age, and Her Virginal Body Remains Permanently in that State; She Supports Her Most Holy Son and St. Joseph by Her Labor.

144. Our great Queen and Lady occupied Herself in the divine exercises and mysteries which I have pointed out (but could not fully describe) in the preceding chapters, in particular after her most holy Son reached his twelfth year. In the course of time our Savior passed the period of his adolescence at eighteen and his most blessed Mother, according to the dates of his Incarnation and Birth given above (*Inc.* 138, 475), reached her perfect growth in her thirty-third year. I call it that because according to the parts in which the life of man is commonly divided (currently there are six or seven), the age of thirty-three years is that of full bodily growth and perfection, being the end of youthful vigor, or as others would have it the beginning of it. Whatever opinion is accepted, that is the end of the natural perfection of the body and it lasts only a short time, for immediately corrupted nature, never remaining in the same state (*Job.* 14:2), begins to decline, like the moon which begins to lessen as soon as it has reached fullness. From that time on the body does not grow in length, nor can the increase in bulk be called a perfection, being rather a defect of nature. For this reason Christ our Lord died at the completion of his thirty-third year, for his most ardent love induced Him to wait only until his body had attained its perfect growth and vigor and was in all respects most capable of bringing the perfect gifts of nature and grace to this sacrifice; not that divine grace was in need of any growth in Him, but so his human nature would correspond with the perfection of grace, and nothing would be lacking even exteriorly to the completeness of his sacrifice for mankind. In accordance with this it is said the Almighty created Adam and Eve in the condition of a man and woman at the age of thirty-three years. Of course it is true that in the first and second age of the world, when the life of man was much longer, in dividing the periods of human life (whether six or seven parts, or more, or less) many more years would have to be counted for each period before the time of David than after that time, when old age begins at seventy years (*Ps.* 89:10).

145. When therefore the Queen of heaven arrived at her thirty-third year her virginal body had attained full natural growth, so well proportioned and beautiful that She was the admiration not only of human nature but of the angelic spirits themselves. She had grown in size and stature to the most perfect proportion in all the parts of her body, and most strikingly resembled her divine Son in features and complexion when later on He arrived at that age, of course always taking into account that Christ was the most perfect man while his Mother was the most perfect woman. Other mortals, because of the decline of the natural humors and temperature, ordinarily begin to deteriorate and gradually approach decay as far as their body is concerned; the exquisite balance of bodily humors is disturbed and the earthly ones begin to predominate more and more, the hair begins to whiten, the countenance to wrinkle, the blood to cool, some of the strength to weaken, and the whole human frame, in spite of the greatest care, begins to decline toward old age and corruption. But in most holy Mary it was not so, for the wonderful beauty and strength which She had attained at the age of thirty-three years remained unchanged, and when She had reached her seventieth year, as I shall relate later on (*Cor.* 736), She had the same integrity as at thirty-three, with the same forces and disposition of her virginal body.

146. The great Lady was well aware of this special privilege conceded to Her by the Most High, and She rendered Him most humble gratitude. She understood also it was granted to Her so the likeness of her most holy Son would always be preserved in Her, though with the

differences consequent upon her different nature and longer life, for the Lord attained full bodily growth at thirty-three years, while She retained it during her much longer life. St. Joseph, although he was not so very old at the time when the Mistress of the world reached her thirty-third year, was much broken and worn out as far as his body was concerned, for his continual cares, his journeys, and his incessant labors for the sustenance of his Spouse and of the Lord had weakened him much more than his years. This was so ordained by the Lord, who desiring to lead him on to the practice of patience and other virtues permitted him to suffer sickness and pain (as I shall relate in the following chapter). His most prudent Spouse, knowing that he was much weakened, and always having loved and served him better than any spouse ever did her husband, spoke to him and said: "My spouse and my master, I find myself deeply obliged for thy fidelity and labors, vigilance and care which thou hast bestowed, since by the sweat of thy brow thou hast until now supported me, thy servant, and my most holy Son, the true God. In this solicitude thou hast spent thy strength and the best part of thy health and thy life in protecting mine. From the hand of the Most High thou shalt receive the reward of such works and the blessings of sweetness which thou hast merited (Ps. 20:4). Yet now I beseech thee, my master, to rest from thy labors, since thy weakened strength cannot anymore bear them. I desire to be grateful and labor from now on in thy service and for the sustenance by which the Lord gives us life."

147. The Saint listened to the reasoning of his most sweet Spouse with abundant tears of most humble gratitude and consolation. Although he at first earnestly entreated Her to be allowed to continue always in his labors, yet at last he yielded to her request and obeyed his Spouse and the Mistress of the world. From that time on he rested from the hard labor of his hands by which he had earned a livelihood for all three. They gave away the carpenter tools as an alms, not desiring to have anything superfluous or useless in their house and family. Being thus at leisure, St. Joseph occupied himself entirely in the contemplation of the mysteries of which he was the guardian and in the exercise of the virtues. Since he had the happiness and good fortune of continually enjoying the sight and conversation of the divine Wisdom incarnate, and of She who was his Mother, this man of God reached such a height of sanctity that, his heavenly Spouse excepted, no one ever surpassed him, and he far outdistanced all other creatures. Since the Queen of heaven Herself, as well as her most holy Son, attended upon and served this most happy man in his infirmities, consoling and sustaining him with such great punctuality, there are no terms to manifest the affections of humility, reverence and love which this benefit caused in the simple and grateful heart of St. Joseph, without doubt he was the admiration and joy of the angelic spirits and of highest pleasure and approbation of the Most High.

148. Thenceforth the Mistress of the world took upon Herself the task of supporting by her work her most holy Son and her spouse, for such was the will of the eternal Wisdom in order to raise Her to the very pinnacle of all virtues and perfections, and in order to furnish an example for the confusion of the daughters and sons of Adam and Eve. The Lord set up for us as a model this strong Woman, clothed with beauty and fortitude. At this age of thirty-three years She was to show Herself girded with strength and ready to extend her hands to the poor, purchasing the field and cultivating the vineyard by her own labor to bring forth its fruits. *The heart of her husband trusted in Her* (as it says in the Proverbs [31:11]), and not only that of her husband St. Joseph, but also that of her Son, the true Godman, the Teacher of the poor and the Poor of the poor, and they were not deceived. The great Queen began to busy Herself much more in spinning and weaving linen and wool, thus mysteriously fulfilling all that Solomon says about Her in chapter XXXI of the Proverbs (10ff.). But since I have explained this chapter of Scriptures at the end of

the first Part I shall not repeat it here, although much of what I said there pertains to this period of her life when both interiorly and exteriorly She executed it in action.

149. The Lord was not lacking in means to sustain his human life and that of his most holy Mother and St. Joseph, since not by bread alone does man live and is sustained (Mt. 4:4); He could have created it by his mere word, as He himself assures us.* He could have each day miraculously created the necessary food, but then the world would have been deprived of this spectacle of his most holy Mother, Mistress of all creation, laboring for their sustenance, and the Virgin herself would have been deprived of the reward due to these meritorious works. All was arranged with admirable providence by the Master of our salvation for the glory of our Queen and for our instruction. Her diligence and care in these employments cannot be expressed in words. She labored much, and because She always lived in retirement She was assisted by that most fortunate woman of whom I have spoken before (*Inc.* 227, 423). This woman assumed some of the labor of the great Queen and performed the necessary errands; yet our Lady never used any command when seeking her assistance, but asked and supplicated her with the utmost humility, always seeking to find out her wishes by asking her whether she would want or like to do this or that. Her blessed Son, like his heavenly Mother, ate no meat; their nourishment was only fish, fruit and herbs, and these only in the greatest moderation. For St. Joseph She procured flesh meat, and though their necessity and poverty was apparent also in this, yet it was seasoned by the good will and loving kindness with which She served it to her spouse. The diligent Lady slept but little, and often She spent the greater part of the night in work, for the Lord now permitted Her to spend more time in such employment than in Egypt (*Inc.* 658). Sometimes it happened that with all her diligence and labor She could not earn what was necessary, for St. Joseph now had need of more expensive nourishment and clothes than before. At such times Christ our Lord made use of his almighty power in multiplying what was in their possession, or in commanding the Angels to bring the necessaries from elsewhere.† Yet He performed more of these wonders with his most holy Mother, disposing that She would accomplish much labor of her hands in a short time, and thus multiply her work.

*INSTRUCTION OF MARY MOST HOLY,
THE QUEEN OF HEAVEN.*

150. My daughter, in what thou hast written of my labors thou hast understood most exalted instruction for thy government and the imitation of me; and in order for thee to avoid forgetting it entirely, I shall summarize it to these points. I desire thee to imitate me in three virtues which thou hast identified I had in what thou hast written; they are prudence, charity and justice, little regarded by mortals. By prudence thou must anticipate the necessities of thy neighbor and the means of assisting them as far as possible in thy state. By charity thou must be moved to diligently and lovingly remedy their needs. Justice teaches thee it is an obligation thus to act, as thou dost desire to be done to thee, and as the needy one desires. Thou must be *an eye to the blind* (Job. 29:15); he who is deaf thou must instruct; and he without hands thou must serve by using thine in laboring for him. And though, according to thy state of life, thou must primarily practice this doctrine in what is spiritual, yet I also desire thee to understand it regarding what is temporal, so in all things thou mayest be most faithful in imitating me; for I also provided for the

* cf. Mt. 6:25-26 [Ed.]

† cf. Mt. 6:33 [Ed.]

necessity of my spouse, and determined to serve and support him, judging that I owed this to him, and I did this by my labor with ardent charity until he died. And though the Lord had given him to me so he could support me, and he did so with the utmost fidelity for as long as he had the strength, yet when his strength failed this obligation became mine, since the Lord himself gave me strength; and it would have been a great fault not to respond to him with courtesy and sincerity.

151. The children of the Church pay no attention to this example, and thus among them has been introduced a perverse impiety which greatly urges the just Judge to chastise them severely. For even though all mortals are born to labor (Job 5:7), not only after the first sin when they immediately incurred it as a punishment, but also from the creation of the first man (Gen. 2:15), not only is work not evenly distributed among men, but the rich and powerful, and those whom the world calls lords and nobles, all try to exempt themselves from this common law, so the burden may be borne by the poor and humble of society. The poor sustain by their own sweat the pride and ostentation of the rich, and the weak and frail serve the strong and powerful. In many of the proud this perversity can be so extreme that they come to think this subservience is due to them, and by this judgment they subjugate, humiliate and despise the poor (James 2:6); they presume that others live only for them so they can enjoy the leisure and delights of the world and its goods, and even refuse to pay the small wages for their labor. In this matter of not paying proper wages to the poor and to servants, and in the rest thou hast come to know of this, thou couldst record very grave crimes committed against the order and will of the Most High; yet let it be known that just as the rich pervert justice and reason, and do not want to participate in the labor of men, so likewise will mercy be inverted for them (Wis. 6:7), being granted to the lowly and despised. Those who in their pride gave themselves up to sluggish idleness shall be chastised with the demons whom they have imitated in this.

152. Thou, dearest, pay attention to what thou knowest of this deception. By my example always keep work in front of thee, and separate thyself from the children of Belial (II Par. 13:7), who so idly seek the applause of vanity (Ps. 4:3) so they labor in vain. Do not judge thyself preeminent or superior, but a slave of thy subjects, of the most weak and lowly, diligently serving them all without distinction. Accommodate thyself to them, laboring for their sustenance if it becomes necessary, and understand this is incumbent upon thee, not only as an abbess, but also because the religious is thy sister, a daughter of thy heavenly Father and a creature of the Lord, who is thy Spouse. Having received more than all of them from his generous hand, yet having merited it less, thou art also obliged to labor more than any other. Relieve those who are sick and weak from bodily labor, and take it upon thyself. I desire thee not only to avoid charging others with work which thou canst perform thyself and which pertains to thee, but rather take upon thy shoulders, as far as possible, the labor of all as their servant* and inferior, as I desire thee to understand and judge thyself. And since thou cannot do all thyself, and it is proper for thee to distribute bodily labor to thy subjects, I counsel thee to maintain order and equity, not putting more burden upon those who resist less due to humility or weakness; rather, I desire thee to take care to humble those who are more haughty and proud, and who reluctantly apply themselves to labor. Yet this must be done without irritating them and by much harshness, but with humble firmness and strictness thou must compel the lukewarm and those of a challenging disposition to submit to the yoke of holy obedience; in doing this thou dost confer upon them the greatest benefit and satisfy thy own obligation and conscience, and thou must

* cf. Mt. 20:27; 23:11 [Ed.]

make sure they understand it that way. All this thou shalt accomplish if thou art not a respecter of persons* of any condition, and if to each one thou dost assign the work of which she is capable and which is needed for herself and the community, by this equity and impartiality obliging and compelling them to abhor idleness and laziness, seeing thee first assign thyself the most difficult work. In this way thou shalt gain a humble liberty of commanding them; yet do not command another to do work thou canst do thyself, in order to enjoy the fruit and the reward of thy labor in imitation of me, obeying what I admonish and command thee.

* cf. Acts 10:34; James 2:1-9 [Ed.]