

CHAPTER IV

By the Miracles and Works of Christ, and by Those of St. John the Baptist, the Demon is Disturbed and Mistaken; Herod Arrests and Beheads St. John; and what Occurred at His Death.

355. Continuing his preaching and miracles the Redeemer of the world departed from Jerusalem for the land of Judea, where He remained for some time baptizing (as St. John the Evangelist records in chapter III [v. 22], although declaring afterwards in chapter IV [v. 2] this sacramental Baptism was administered by the disciples of Christ); at the same time his Precursor also continued to baptize in Ennon on the banks of the Jordan near the city of Salim.* However, they were not one and the same baptism, for St. John continued to give only the baptism of water and of penance, while our Lord administered his own Baptism, that of real pardon of sins and justification such as it is now administered in the Church, accompanied by the infusion of grace and the virtues. To the mysterious power and effects of the Baptism of Christ was moreover added the efficacy of his words and instructions confirmed by the wonders of his miracles. Because of this more disciples and followers soon gathered around Christ than around St. John, in fulfillment of that which the Saint himself had said (Jn. 3:30): *He must increase, but I must decrease*. When the Baptism of Christ was being administered his most holy Mother was ordinarily present, recognizing the divine effects which that new regeneration caused in these souls; and as if She herself was receiving these graces by means of this Sacrament, She gave thanks for them and rendered the return due to their Author by canticles of praise and profound acts of the virtues by which in all these marvels She earned new and incomparable merits.

356. When by divine permission Lucifer and his followers arose from the ruinous defeat which they had experienced at the triumph of Christ in the desert, and when they returned and saw the works of the most holy humanity of Christ, divine Providence ordained that they, though always remaining ignorant of the principal mystery connected with Christ, would nevertheless come to know enough as would suffice to conquer them by their own malice. Lucifer knew the great fruit of the preaching, miracles and Baptism of Christ our Lord, and that by these means innumerable souls were withdrawn from his jurisdiction, departing from sin and reforming their lives. The same effects he also recognized in the preaching of St. John and in his baptism, though always remaining ignorant of the hidden difference between these two preachers and their baptisms; yet by these events he conjectured the destruction of his empire if the works of the new preachers, Christ our Good and St. John, continued. By these new events Lucifer was disturbed and confused, for he well knew his forces were too weak to resist the power of heaven which he felt exerted against him in these new preachers and their doctrines. Disturbed then by his own pride regarding these suspicions, he called another meeting of the princes of darkness and said to them: "We have discovered great and strange things occurring in the world during these years, and every day do they multiply, so my fears lest the divine Word has come into the world according to the promise are growing more and more harrowing. I have searched the face of the whole earth and cannot find Him. But these two men who are preaching and deprive me every day of many souls excite within me great misgivings. The one I could never overcome in the desert, and the other vanquished all of us, so even now we are disheartened and crushed. If they continue as

* cf. Jn. 3:23 [Ed.]

they have begun all our triumphs will turn to confusion. They cannot both be the Messiah, and I cannot as yet be sure that either one of them is He; but to draw so many souls from a life of sin is a work not equaled by any to this day. It supposes a new power which we must investigate and trace to its source, and we must destroy these two men. Follow me and assist me with all your strength, astuteness and sagacity, lest they frustrate our intentions.”

357. These ministers of evil therefore came to the determination of persecuting anew our Savior Christ and his great Precursor John, but since they had no knowledge of the mysteries of the uncreated Wisdom all their great projects and resolves were demented and without firmness. They were deluded and confused, for they witnessed on the one hand so many miracles, and on the other outward appearances entirely different from those which they had attributed to the coming of the incarnate Word. Hence their prince Lucifer, in order to make better understood the malicious plans he had, and to make all his allies capable of the attempts he planned, namely to spy out and discover the source of their feeling debilitated, for they knew not from whence it came, he ordered meetings of the demons to be held in which they were to communicate to each other what they had seen and understood concerning recent events, and he offered them great rewards in his republic of evil for their assistance. For the purpose of throwing them into still greater doubt and confusion, the Master of life permitted them to take greater notice of the sanctity of the Baptist. He did not perform the same wonders as Christ, yet the outward signs of his sanctity were impressive and his exterior virtues were very admirable; moreover, His Majesty also concealed some of his own more extraordinary wonders from the dragon. There was a great similarity between Christ and St. John in regard to certain particulars which came to the knowledge of Lucifer, and hence he remained in doubt and could not come to a certain decision as to which of them really deserved to hold the office and dignity of Messiah. “Both (he said) are great Saints and Prophets. The life of the one is that of the common people, yet extraordinary and strange in some respects. The other performs many miracles and his doctrine is nearly the same. Both cannot be the Messiah; but whatever they may be, I recognize them as my great enemies and as Saints, and must persecute them until I have undone them.”

358. These suspicions of the demon began from the time when he saw St. John in the desert leading such a wonderful and unheard-of life even from his childhood, and at the time he thought his virtues were greater than what those of a mere man could be; on the other hand, he also learned of some of the doings and heroic virtues of the life of Christ our Lord, which were not less wonderful, and the dragon compared them with those of St. John. Yet since the Savior lived a life more according to the common order among men, Lucifer was more anxious to find out who this John could be. With this desire he incited the Jews and the Pharisees of Jerusalem to send the priests and Levites to St. John in order to ascertain who he was (Jn. 1:19), more specifically whether he was Christ as through Lucifer they were led to suspect. And his suggestions must have been very vehement, since they knew the Baptist was of the tribe of Levi, and hence it was well known he could not be the Messiah, for according to the Scriptures he was to be of the tribe of Juda (Ps. 131:11), and they, being learned in the law, were not ignorant of these truths. But Lucifer disturbed them, and obliged them to ask that question with his own duplicitous malice; for if St. John was the Messiah he wanted him to reveal it; if not, he wanted to diminish his influence with the people who believed him to be the Messiah; and at the very least he wanted St. John to fall into vain complacency or usurp, either wholly or in part, the honor thus held out to him. Hence the demon eagerly listened to every word of the answer given by St. John.

359. But the holy Precursor answered with heavenly wisdom, confessing the truth in such a way that the astuteness of the enemy was foiled and his uncertainty was greater than before. He answered saying *I am not the Christ* (Jn. 1:20). Then they asked him whether he was Elias, for since it was written of Elias that he was to come before Christ, and as the Jews were so sluggish as not to know how to distinguish between the first and second coming,^{*} they asked him whether he was Elias. He answered (Ib. 21, 23): *I am not*, adding: *I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord*, as said the prophet Isaias (40:3). All these questions were put by the messengers through instigation of the enemy, for he expected that if St. John was a holy man he would tell the truth and therefore reveal clearly who he was. When he heard St. John call himself a *voice* he was much taken aback, suspecting in his ignorance that he meant to call himself the eternal Word. His restlessness was augmented all the more when he reflected on the apparent unwillingness of St. John to reveal himself to the Jews. Hence he suspected that his having called himself a *voice* was only a covered way of speaking. The demon argued that if St. John had called himself openly the Word of God he would have thereby revealed his divinity; hence in order not to discover himself, he did not call himself *word* but *voice*. Into such confusion of mind did Lucifer fall concerning the mystery of the Incarnation, and while he believed the Jews had been deluded and misled, he himself was deluded even more by all his depraved theology.

360. Thus deceived, his fury against the Baptist outgrew all bounds. But remembering his defeats in the battles against the Savior, and conscious of having had just as little success in leading St. John into a fault of any gravity, he resolved to make war upon him by another way. He found one very opportune: The Baptist had reprehended Herod for his disgraceful and adulterous union with Herodias, who had openly left her husband Philip, Herod's brother, as is related by the Evangelists (Mt. 14:3-4; Mk. 6:17-18; Lk. 3:19). Herod knew the holiness and reasoning of St. John; he held him in respect and fear, and heard him willingly. Yet whatever force truth and light exerted in the wicked king was perverted by the execrable and boundless hatred of the most wicked Herodias and her daughter, who was like her mother in morals. The adulteress was deeply degraded by her passions and sensuality, and by this was well disposed to be the instrument of the demon in whatever evil he proposed. The demon first instigated her to bring about the death of St. John by various means, and she incited the king to behead the Baptist. Herod having imprisoned St. John, who was the voice of God himself and the greatest of those born of woman,[†] the day arrived in which he was to celebrate the anniversary of his unhappy birth by a banquet and ball given by him for the magistrates and nobles of Galilee (Mk. 6:21), of which he was king. The degraded Herodias brought her daughter to the feast in order to dance before the guests. The blinded and adulterous king was so taken in by the dancing girl that he promised her any gift or favor she desired, even if it were the half of his kingdom. She, directed by her mother and both of them by the cunning of the serpent, asked for more than a kingdom, yea, more than many kingdoms, namely the head of John the Baptist, and that it be given to her immediately on a plate. The king commanded it to be done due to the oath he had taken and because he had subjected himself to the influence of a vile and degraded woman. Men are accustomed to consider it an unbearable offense to be called a woman, because they think it denies them the superiority deemed peculiar to manhood; but it is a greater disgrace to be governed and led about by the whims of women, for he who obeys is inferior to the one who

^{*} cf. *Transfixion* 53 [Ed.]

[†] cf. Lk. 7:28 [Ed.]

commands. And yet many are thus degraded without adverting thereto, and so much the greater is their degradation the more immodest the woman they follow, for having lost the virtue of modesty nothing remains in a woman which is not most despicable and abominable in the sight of God and man.

361. During the imprisonment of St. John at the insistence of Herodias, he was much favored by our Savior and his heavenly Mother by means of the holy Angels, whom the great Lady sent to visit him many times, and sometimes She sent him food, commanding the Angels to prepare and bring it to him. The Lord also conferred on him many interior graces and favors. But the demon, who wished to destroy him, gave no rest to Herodias until he saw him dead. He eagerly seized the occasion of the banquet, inciting Herod to utter that foolish promise and oath for the sake of the daughter of Herodias, and confusing his mind so he impiously looked upon the failure to fulfill his sworn promise as a sin and a dishonor; and hence in his blindness he delivered the head of the Baptist to the dancing girl, as is related in the Gospel (Mk. 6:27). At the same time the Princess of the world knew in the interior of her most holy Son (by the usual manner) that the hour of martyrdom had arrived for the Baptist, and that he would give his life in testimony of the truths he had preached. The most pure Mother prostrated Herself at the feet of Christ our Lord and tearfully implored Him to assist his servant and Precursor in that hour, to comfort and console him, and that his death be so much the more precious in his eyes since he would suffer for the honor and defense of the truth.

362. The Savior responded with pleasure to her petition, saying He desired to fulfill it entirely and commanding the most blessed Mother to follow Him. Then by divine power Christ and his holy Mother were miraculously and invisibly transported to the dungeon cell where St. John lay fettered in chains and wounded in many parts of his body, for the wicked adulteress, wishing to do away with him, had ordered some of her servants (six on three different occasions) to scourge and maltreat him, which they did in order to please their mistress. By this means that tigress had attempted to murder the Baptist before the banquet at which Herod commanded him to be beheaded. The demon incited these cruel henchmen so with great wrath they might injure him in deed and word with great contumelies and blasphemies against his person and the doctrine he preached, for they were most perverse men, appropriate servants and private ministers of such a wretched, adulterous and scandalous woman. The presence of Christ and his Blessed Mother filled that foul prison of the Baptist with celestial light. While the other parts of the palace of Herod were infested by innumerable demons and sycophants more criminal than the state prisoners in the dungeons below, the cell of St. John was entirely sanctified by the presence of the Sovereigns of heaven, who were accompanied by a great host of Angels.

363. As soon as the Precursor beheld before him the Redeemer and his most holy Mother in the midst of the angelic hosts his chains fell from him and his wounds were healed. With ineffable joy he prostrated himself on the ground and in deepest humility and admiration asked the blessing of the incarnate Word and his most holy Mother. Having fulfilled his request, they remained for some time holding divine colloquies with their friend and servant which I cannot repeat in entirety here, though I shall mention some of what impressed itself more vividly on my dull mind. In kindest tone and manner the Savior said: "John, my servant, how eagerly dost thou precede thy Master in being scourged, imprisoned and afflicted, and in offering thy life and suffering death for the glory of my Father even before I myself thus suffer! Thy desires are quickly approaching their fulfillment, since thou art soon to enjoy the reward for suffering tribulations such as I myself have in view for my humanity. It is thus the eternal Father rewards the zeal with which thou hast fulfilled the office of being my Precursor. Let thy affectionate

anxieties be fulfilled and offer thy neck to the axe, for I desire it so, and that thou attain my blessing and the eternal bliss of suffering and dying for my Name. I offer thy death to the eternal Father so my life be prolonged.”

364. The sweetness and power of these words penetrated the heart of the Baptist and filled it with such delights of divine love that for a time he could not give any response. But being reinforced by divine grace and dissolved in tears, he thanked his Lord and Master for the ineffable favor of this visit, which was now added to so many other great ones he had received at his hands, and with sighs of love from his inmost soul he said: “Eternal Good and my Lord, I cannot ever merit pains and tribulations which would be worthy of such a great favor and consolation as that of enjoying thy true presence and that of thy worthy Mother, my Lady; unworthy am I of this new benefit. So thy boundless mercy may be more magnified grant me, Lord, permission to die in thy presence, so thy holy Name may be made more widely known, and receive my desire of suffering for Thee the most painful and lingering death. Let Herod and sin, and hell itself, triumph over my life, that I may deliver it to Thee, my Beloved, with joy; receive it, my God, as a pleasing sacrifice. And thou, Mother of my Savior and my Lady, turn toward thy servant the most gracious eyes of thy sweetest mercy, and grant it to me always by thy grace as a Mother and the cause of all our good. All my life I have embraced the contempt of vanity and loved the cross which is to be sanctified by my Redeemer, and I have desired to sow in tears (Ps. 125:5); but never could I merit the joy of this visit, which in my torments has made suffering sweet, my bondage pleasant, and death itself more appealing and agreeable than life.”

365. While they were yet engaged in this conversation three servants of Herod entered his prison with a hangman ready to execute upon him the implacable fury of the cruel adulteress. St. John presented his neck and the executioner fulfilled the impious order of Herod by cutting off his head. The High Priest Christ at the same moment received in his arms the body of the greatest of those born of woman, while his Blessed Mother held his head in her hands, both of them offering this victim to the eternal Father on the altar of their sacred hands. This was possible not only because the two Sovereigns of the world were invisible, but also because the servants of Herod had begun to argue regarding which of them would flatter the infamous dancer and her mother by bringing them the head of St. John. In their dispute one of them, without paying attention to any other circumstance, snatched the head from the hands of the Queen of heaven and the rest of them followed in order to offer it on a plate to the daughter of Herodias. The sacred soul of the Baptist, in the company of a multitude of Angels, was sent to limbo, and his arrival renewed the joy of the holy souls there imprisoned. The Sovereigns of heaven returned to the place from whence they had come. Regarding the sanctity and excellence of the great Precursor many things are written in the Church, and though I have been informed of several other mysteries concerning him which I could relate, I cannot depart from my original purpose or extend this History in writing of them. I wish only to say that the fortunate and blessed Precursor of Christ received great favors at the hands of Christ the Redeemer and his holy Mother during the whole course of his life, in his happy birth, his stay in the desert, his preaching, and in his holy death. Such wonders have been wrought for no other man by the right hand of God.

TEACHING OF MARY MOST HOLY, THE QUEEN OF HEAVEN.

366. My daughter, thou hast been very sparse in describing the mysteries of this chapter, yet a great lesson is contained therein for thee and all the children of light. Write in thy heart and

notice well the great difference between the sanctity and purity of the Baptist, who was poor, afflicted, persecuted and imprisoned, and the abominable wickedness of Herod, the powerful king, who was flattered and served in the midst of his riches and base pleasures. Both were of the same human nature, yet entirely different in the sight of God based upon how they used their free will and the created things around them for good or evil. The penance, poverty, humility, contempt and tribulations of St. John, and his zeal for the glory of my divine Son, merited for him the singular favor of dying in our arms. Herod, on the contrary, by his hollow pomp, his pride, vanity, tyranny and wickedness was struck down by the minister of God in order to be punished in the eternal flames of hell. Remember the same happens now and always in the world, though men do not pay attention to it or fear it; rather, they fear the vain strength of the world, not reflecting that it is but fleeting shadow and withering grass.*

367. Just as little do men think of their last end, and of the abyss into which their vices draw them even in this world. Although the demon cannot take away the liberty of man, nor ever completely sway his free will, yet by leading them into so many and grievous sins he obtains such an influence over their free will that he is enabled to use them as an instrument of the evil he proposes.† In spite of witnessing so many and such terrible examples, men remain callous to the fearful danger to which they expose themselves by their sins in imitation of Herod and his adulterous concubine. In order to cast souls into this abyss of wickedness Lucifer meets them with the vain pride and honor of this world, and with its base pleasures, representing them as alone important and desirable. Thus the ignorant children of perdition loosen the bonds of reason in order to follow the degrading pleasures of their flesh and be enslaved by their mortal enemy. My daughter, the way of humility and contempt, of abasement and afflictions is what Christ my most holy Son taught, and I with Him. This is the royal road of life upon which we first walked and constituted ourselves as special Teachers and Protectors of the afflicted and weary. When they call upon us in their necessities we assist them in a wonderful manner and with special favors, while the followers of the world and its vain pleasures deprive themselves of this help and benefit, since they abhor the way of the cross. To it thou hast been called and invited, and drawn along by the sweetness of my love and doctrine. Follow me and labor to imitate me, since thou hast found the hidden treasure and the precious pearl (Mt. 13:44-5), for the possession of which thou must deprive thyself of all that is earthly and according to thy will insofar as it is contrary to the will of the most exalted Lord and to my will.

* cf. Jn. 15:6 [Ed.]

† cf. *Coronation* 298 and 424 [Ed.]