

CHAPTER XII

The Human Race having been Propagated, the Clamors of the Just for the Coming of the Messiah Increased, and also Sin Increased; in This Night of the Ancient Law God Sent Two Luminaries to Announce the Law of Grace.

163. The posterity and lineage of Adam spread out in great numbers, multiplying the just and the unjust, as well as the clamors of the saints for the Repairer, and the transgressions of sinners in demerit of that benefit. The people of the Most High and the plans for the triumph of the Word who was to assume human nature were already in the last stages of preparation for the advent of the Messiah; for the reign of sin in the children of perdition had extended its malice almost to the ends of the earth, and the opportune time for the remedy had arrived. The merits and the crowns of the just had been multiplied, and the Prophets and holy Fathers, by the joy of divine light, recognized the approach of the presence and salvation of the Redeemer; they multiplied their clamors, beseeching God to fulfill the prophecies and promises made to his people. Before the royal throne of the divine mercy they asked God to remember the long and heavy night (Wis. 17:20) which had passed in the darkness of sin since the creation of the first man, and the blindness of idolatry which had enshrouded all the rest of the human race.

164. When the ancient serpent had infected the whole earth with his breath, and seemed to relish peaceful possession over mortals; when they strayed from the light of natural reason itself (Rom. 1:20ff.), which they should have feared according to the ancient written law; when instead of seeking the true Divinity, they imagined many false ones, each one fashioning a god to his own liking, without realizing that the confusion of so many gods was repugnant to perfection, order and peace; when by these errors malice, ignorance, and forgetfulness of the true God had now become commonplace, and the deadly illness and lethargy suffered in the world was ignored, without the miserable victims opening their mouths to plead for a remedy; when pride reigned, the number of fools had become countless (Eccles. 1:15), and Lucifer in his arrogance was trying to drink dry the pure waters of the Jordan (Job 40:18); when by these insults God was most offended and least obliged by man, and the attribute of his justice had such a justified cause to annihilate all creation and reduce it to its original nothingness:

165. At this juncture (according to our way of understanding) the Most High turned his attention to the attribute of his mercy, and inclined the weight of his incomprehensible equity toward the law of clemency, and desired to be obliged more by his own goodness and to the clamors and services of the just and the Prophets of his people, that to be disobliged by the wickedness and offenses of all the balance of sinners. In that so heavy night of the ancient law He resolved to give certain pledges of the day of grace, sending to the world two most illustrious luminaries who would announce the approaching dawn of the Sun of justice, Christ our salvation. These were St. Joachim and St. Anne, foreseen and created by the divine will in order to be made conformable to his Heart. St. Joachim had his home, family and relatives in Nazareth, a town of Galilee. He was always a just and holy man, illumined by special grace and light from on high. He had an understanding of many mysteries of the Scriptures and the ancient Prophets; and with continual and fervent prayer* he asked of God the fulfillment of his promises, and his faith and charity penetrated the heavens. He was a man most humble and pure, of holy conduct

* cf. James 5:16 [Ed.]

and utmost sincerity, yet of great gravitas and seriousness, and of incomparable integrity and honesty.

166. The most happy St. Anne had her home in Bethlehem, and was a most chaste, humble and beautiful maiden, and from her childhood she was holy, composed, and full of virtues. She also had great and continuous enlightenments from the Most High, and always occupied her interior with most exalted contemplation; together with this she was most diligent and hardworking, by which she attained the plenitude of perfection in both the active and the contemplative life. She had infused knowledge of the divine Scriptures, and a profound understanding of its hidden mysteries and sacraments; and in the infused virtues of faith, hope and charity she was incomparable. With these gifts she prayed continuously for the coming of the Messiah; and her entreaties were so acceptable to the Lord for hastening his coming, that He could especially respond to her: *Thou hast wounded my heart with one of thy hairs* (Cant. 4:9). Thus without any doubt the merits of St. Anne hold the highest place among the saints of the Old Testament in hastening the coming of the Word.

167. This strong woman also prayed fervently that the Almighty for the state of matrimony give her the company of a spouse who would help her keep the divine law and holy testament, and to be perfect in the observance of its precepts. At the same time in which St. Anne prayed for this to the Lord, his providence ordained that St. Joachim made the same petition, so these two petitions were presented together in the tribunal of the most blessed Trinity, where they were heard and granted. Immediately by divine decree it was arranged that Joachim and Anne take the state of matrimony together, and would be the parents of She who was to be the Mother of the incarnate God Himself. In order to execute this decree, the holy archangel Gabriel was sent to manifest it to both of them. To St. Anne he appeared corporeally while she was in fervent prayer, pleading for the coming of the Savior of the world and the remedy of men. She saw the holy Prince with great beauty and refulgence, which at the same time cause her a certain perplexity and fear with interior joy and enlightenment of spirit. The Saint prostrated herself with profound humility in order to reverence the ambassador of heaven, yet he prevented her and comforted her, since she was the depository who was to be given most holy Mary, the ark of the true manna and Mother of the Incarnate Word; for this holy Archangel had already been informed of this mystery of the Lord and the hidden sacrament when he was sent with this message, though at that time none of the other Angels of heaven knew it, since only St. Gabriel had been given this revelation or illumination directly from the Lord. Neither at that time did the Angel manifest this great sacrament to St. Anne, but he asked for her attention and said: "The Most High give thee his blessing, servant of God, and be thy salvation. His Highness has heard thy petitions, and desires thee to persevere in them, and clamor for the coming of the Savior. It is his will for thee to receive Joachim for thy spouse, who is a man of upright heart and pleasing in the eyes of the Lord, and with his company thou shalt be able to persevere in the observance of his divine law and in his service. Continue thy prayers and supplications, and for thy part be not solicitous for anything else,* for the Lord himself shall ordain how they shall be done. Walk in the straight paths of justice, and let thy interior habitation be always on high. Pray continually for the coming of the Messiah, and rejoice in the Lord, who is thy salvation." With this the Angel disappeared, leaving her enlightened in many mysteries of Holy Scriptures, and comforted and renewed in spirit.

* cf. I Tim. 4:15 [Ed.]

168. The Archangel appeared and spoke to St. Joachim, not corporeally as to St. Anne, but in sleep the man of God perceived him saying these words: "Joachim, be thou blessed by the divine right hand of the Most High. Persevere in thy desires and live in righteousness, walking in perfection. It is the will of the Lord that thou receive Anne for thy spouse, who is a soul to whom the Almighty has given his blessing. Take care of her and esteem her as a pledge of the Most High, and give thanks to His Majesty because he has entrusted her to thy care." By virtue of these divine messages Joachim immediately asked the most chaste Anne to be his spouse, and the marriage took place, both obeying the divine arrangement; yet neither manifested to the other the secret of what had happened until several years passed, as I will relate in its place (*Con.* 184). The two holy spouses lived in Nazareth, proceeding and walking according to the justifications of the Lord; and with uprightness and sincerity they gave the fullness of virtues to their works, making themselves very pleasing and acceptable to the Most High, without reproach. The income and fruits of their estate they divided each year into three parts: The first part they offered to the temple of Jerusalem for the worship of the Lord, the second they distributed to the poor, and with the third they supported their lives and households decently. God augmented their temporal goods, because they dispensed them with such generosity and charity.

169. They also lived in inviolate peace and conformity of spirit, without quarrel and without any discord. The most humble Anne live in subjection and submission to Joachim in all things; and that man of God, with holy emulation of the same humility, anticipated the desires of holy Anne, trusting his heart to her (Prov. 31:11) without being disappointed. Thus they lived in such perfect charity that during their life together there was the distinction that one never stopped desiring what the other desired; rather, as united together in the name of the Lord, His Majesty was in their midst (Mt. 18:20) by their holy fear. St. Joachim fulfilled and obeyed the command of the Angel that he esteem his spouse and take care of her.

170. The Lord prepared the holy matron Anne with blessings of his sweetness (Ps. 20:4), communicating to her most exalted gifts of grace and infused science, which disposed her for the good fortune which awaited her of being the mother of She who was to be the Mother of the Lord himself. And since the works of God are perfect and consummated, it follows that He would make her a worthy mother of the most pure creature, who in sanctity would be superior to all creatures and inferior only to God.

171. These holy spouses passed twenty years without succession of children, something which in that age and among that people was held as most unfortunate and disgraceful, which caused them to suffer much reproach and contempt from their neighbors and acquaintances; for those who were childless were considered as excluded from having part in the coming of the Messiah for which they hoped. Yet the Most High, who by means of this humiliation desired to afflict them and dispose them for the grace He had prepared for them, gave them patience and resignation so they could sow with tears and prayers the happy fruit which they would afterwards receive (Ps. 125:5). They made great petitions from the depth of their hearts, having received for this a special command from on high; and they offered to the Lord by an express vow that if He gave them a child they would consecrate to his service in the temple the fruit of benediction they would receive.

172. This offering was made by a special impulse of the Holy Ghost, who had ordained that She who was to be the habitation of the onlybegotten Son would, before coming into existence, be offered and as it were presented by her parents to the Lord himself; for if before knowing Her and interacting with Her they had not obligated themselves by a particular vow to offer Her to the temple, after seeing Her such a sweet and pleasing creature they would not have been able to

make this vow with such promptitude due to the vehement love which they would have for Her. According to our mode of understanding, by this offering alone the Lord satisfied the jealousy* He already had regarding his most holy Mother being dependent on others, yet his love entertained itself in the delay in creating Her.

173. Having persevered an entire year after the Lord commanded these fervent petitions of him, it happened that St. Joachim by divine inspiration and command went to the temple of Jerusalem to offer prayers and sacrifices for the coming of the Messiah, and for the fruit which he desired. Arriving with others from his town to offer the common gifts and offerings in the presence of the high priest, an inferior priest named Issachar harshly rebuked the old and venerable Joachim because he, being childless, had come to offer with the rest. Among other things he said to him: “Why dost thou, Joachim, come to offer, being a useless man? Depart from the others and go; do not anger God with thy offerings and sacrifices, which are not pleasing in his sight.” The holy man, shamed and confused, with humility and loving affection turned toward the Lord and said to Him: “Most high Lord and eternal God, by thy command and will I came to the temple; he who is in thy place despises me; my sins deserve this ignominy; yet since I receive it because of thy will, *despise not the work of thy hands*” (Ps. 137:8). Joachim left the temple saddened (yet peaceful and calm) and went to a country house or farm which he possessed, and there in solitude for several days he called upon the Lord and said this prayer:

174. “Most high and eternal God, upon whom depends the existence and repair of the human race, prostrate in thy royal presence I supplicate Thee to deign in thy infinite goodness to look upon the affliction of my soul, and hear my prayers and those of thy servant Anne. To thine eyes are manifest all our desires (Ps. 37:10), and if I do not merit to be heard, do not despise my humble spouse. Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, our first fathers, do not hide thy kindness from us, nor permit, since Thou art a Father, that I be among the reprobate and rejected in my offerings as useless, because Thou givest me no offspring. Remember, Lord, the sacrifices and oblations of thy servants and Prophets (Dt. 9:27), my ancient fathers; and keep present the works which in them were pleasing in thy divine eyes. Since Thou dost command me, my Lord, to petition Thee with confidence, as to one powerful and rich in mercies, grant me what I desire and ask of Thee; for in beseeching Thee I do thy holy will and render the obedience in which Thou hast promised to grant my petition. If my sins prevent thy mercies, take away from me what displeases and hinders Thee. Thou art powerful, Lord God of Israel, and all that is thy will Thou canst accomplish without resistance (Esther 13:9). Let my petitions reach thy ears, for though I am poor and small, Thou art infinite and inclined to exercise mercy with the downtrodden. Where shall I go from Thee,[†] who art the King of kings and the Lord of lords, and almighty? Thy sons and servants Thou hast filled with gifts and blessings in their generations; and Thou hast instructed me to desire and hope from thy liberality what Thou hast wrought with my brethren. If it is Thy good pleasure to grant my petition, the fruit of succession I receive from thy hand I shall offer and consecrate to thy holy temple for thy service. I submit my heart and mind to thy will, and have always desired to turn my eyes away from vanity. Do with me what is according to thy pleasure, and rejoice, O Lord, our spirit with the fulfillment of our hope. Look down from thy throne upon the humble dust, and raise it up so it can magnify and adore Thee, and in all things may thy will and not mine be done.”

* cf. Dt. 4:24 [Ed.]

† cf. Jn. 6:69 [Ed.]

175. While Joachim made this petition in his retirement, the holy Angel declared to St. Anne how pleasing her prayer for a child was to His Highness, made with holy affection, intention and desire. The holy matron, having known it to be the divine will and also of her spouse Joachim, with humble resignation and confidence she prayed in the presence of the Lord as she was commanded, and said: "Most high God, my Lord, universal Creator and Preserver of all things, whom my soul reverences and adores as the true God, infinite, holy and eternal: Prostrate in thy royal presence I shall speak, though I am but dust and ashes (Gen. 18:27), manifesting my necessity and affliction. Lord God uncreated, make us worthy of thy blessing, and give us holy fruit for us to offer to thy service in thy temple. Remember, my Lord, that thy servant Anna, the mother of Samuel, was sterile, yet by thy generous mercy she received the fulfillment of her desires (I Kg. 1ff.). I feel in my heart a force which encourages and inspires me to ask Thee to show me this mercy. Hear then, my sweetest Lord and Master, my humble petition; remember the services, offerings and sacrifices of my ancient fathers, and the favors which the powerful arm of thy omnipotence wrought in them. I desire, Lord, to offer Thee an oblation pleasing and acceptable in thine eyes; but the greatest I can offer is my soul, my faculties and senses Thou gavest me, and my whole being. And if, looking upon me from thy royal throne, thou givest me succession, I now consecrate and offer it for thy service in the temple. Lord God of Israel, if it be thy will and pleasure to look upon this lowly and poor creature, and to console thy servant Joachim, grant me, Lord, this petition; and in all things may thy holy and eternal will be done."

176. These were the petitions made by Sts. Joachim and Anne; and by the understanding I have of them, and of the incomparable sanctity of these happy parents, I cannot, due to my great shortcomings and inadequacy, relate all I know and sense, nor is it possible to say all, or even necessary, since what I have said is sufficient for my purpose. In order to form lofty ideas of these Saints, they must be measured and conformed according to the most exalted purpose and ministry for which they were chosen by God, which was to be the immediate grandparents of Christ our Lord, and parents of his most holy Mother.