Today, on the feast of the Vigil of the Assumption, we continue our periodic look at the lives of the Blessed Virgin and her Divine Son through her revelations to Venerable Maria of Agreda, the remarkable 17th-century Spanish nun, as documented in *The Mystical City of God*. In previous articles, we have examined the visit of the Magi on January 6, the events of the first Palm Sunday on March 25, and the mystical occurrences in Limbo after the crucified Christ "descended into Hell," on March 31.

Here we examine the final events in the earthly life of the most holy Mary, leading up to her Assumption into heaven, which will be addressed in tomorrow's companion piece. All narrative below is drawn from Volume IV (The Coronation), Book Two, Chapters XVII and XVIII. The text of these two chapters has been substantially condensed in the interest of brevity. All directly quoted text is in *italics*. *The Mystical City of God* is available in English both in print edition and online. Of note, the English translation of this four-volume monumental work was begun on the feast of the Assumption in 1902 by Fiscar Marison.

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The most holy Mary had arrived at the age of sixty-seven years without having tarried in her career, ceased in her flight, mitigated the flame of her love, or lessened the increase of her merits from the first instant of her Conception. As all this had continued to grow in each moment of her life, the ineffable gifts, benefits and favors of the Lord had made her entirely godlike and spiritual; the affectionate ardors and desires of her most chaste heart did not allow her any rest outside the center of her love; the bounds of the flesh were most violently irksome; the overwhelming attraction of the Divinity to unite Itself with her with eternal and most close bonds, (according to our mode of speaking) had attained the summit of power in her; and the earth itself, made unworthy by the sins of mortals to contain the Treasure of heaven, could no longer bear the strain of withholding her from her true Lord. The eternal Father desired His only and true Daughter; the Son His beloved and most loving Mother; and the Holy Ghost the embraces of His most beautiful Spouse. The angels longed for their Queen, the saints for their great Lady; and all the heavens mutely awaited the presence of their Empress who should fill them with glory, with her beauty and delight. All that could be alleged in favor of her still remaining in the world and in the Church, was the need of such a Mother and Mistress, and the love, which God Himself had for the miserable children of Adam. But as some term and end was to be placed to the earthly career of our Queen, the divine consistory (according to our mode of understanding), conferred upon the manner of glorifying the most blessed Mother and established the kind of loving reward due to her for having so copiously fulfilled all the designs of the divine mercy among the children of Adam during the many years in which she had been the Foundress and Teacher of His holy Church. The Almighty therefore resolved to delight and console her by giving Her definite

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notice of the term still remaining of her life and revealing to her the day and hour of the longed-for end of her earthly banishment. For this purpose the most blessed Trinity dispatched the archangel Gabriel with many others of the celestial hierarchies, who should announce to the Queen when and how her mortal life should come to an end and pass over into the eternal. The holy prince descended with the rest to the Cenacle in Jerusalem and entered the oratory of the great Lady, where they found her prostrate on the ground in the form of a cross, asking mercy for sinners. But hearing the sound of their music and perceiving them present, she rose to her knees in order to hear the message and show respect to the ambassador of heaven and his companions, who in white and refulgent garments surrounded Her with wonderful delight and reverence. All of them had come with crowns and palms in their hands, each one with a different one; but all of them represented the diverse premiums and rewards of inestimable beauty and value to be conferred upon their great Queen and Lady. Gabriel saluted Her with the Ave Maria, and added thereto: "Our Empress and Lady, the Omnipotent and the Holy of the holy sends us from His heavenly court to announce to Thee in His Name the most happy end of thy pilgrimage and banishment upon earth in mortal life. Soon, O Lady, is that day and hour approaching, in which, according to thy longing desires, thou shalt pass through natural death to the possession of the eternal and immortal life, which awaits Thee in the glory and at the right hand of thy Divine Son, our God. Exactly three years from today thou shalt be taken up and received into the everlasting joy of the Lord, where all its inhabitants await thee, longing for thy presence." The most holy Mary heard this message with ineffable jubilee of her purest and most loving spirit, and, prostrating herself again upon the earth, she answered in the same words as at the Incarnation of the Word: "Ecce ancilla Domini, fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum." "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done according to thy word" (Luke 1, 38).

At this point, Maria of Agreda notes the new urgency with which the Blessed Virgin approached her final numbered days, "hastening on in her heroic efforts" to nurture the infant Church and encouraging the Apostles who became ever more devoted to her after the departure of her Son at His Ascension. While prudently refraining from informing all the Apostles of this dramatic news, she nevertheless made an exception for St. John, her guardian, who in turn informed St. James the Less, the bishop of Jerusalem.

During the course of these three last years of the life of our Queen and Lady, the divine power permitted a certain hidden and sweet force to throw all nature into mourning and sorrow at the prospective death of her who by her life beautified and perfected all creation. The holy Apostles, although they were scattered over the earth, began to feel new anxiety and misgivings regarding the time when they should be deprived of their Mistress and her help; for already the divine light intimated to them, that this event could not be far off. The

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others of the faithful living in Jerusalem and in the country around, began secretly to feel that their treasure and joy should not be theirs much longer. The heavens, the stars and planets lost much of their brightness and beauty, like the day at the approach of night. The birds of the air fell into singular demonstrations of sorrow during these last years. A great multitude of them ordinarily gathered where the most blessed Mary happened to be. Surrounding her oratory in unusual flight and motions, they uttered, instead of their natural songs, sorrowful notes, as if they were lamenting and groaning in their grief, until the Lady herself ordered them again to praise their Creator in their natural and musical tones. Of this miracle Saint John was often a witness, joining them in their lamentations. A few days before the Transition of the heavenly Mother innumerable hosts of the little birds gathered, laying their heads and beaks upon the ground, picking at their breasts in groans, like someone taking farewell forever and asking the last benediction. Not only the birds of the air indulged in this sorrow, but also the brute beasts of the earth; for when one day, according to her custom, the Queen of heaven went to visit the holy places of the Redemption and arrived on mount Calvary many wild beasts came from the surrounding mountains to wait for her. Some of them prostrated themselves upon the ground, others bowed their necks, and all of them uttered sorrowful sounds and thus for some hours manifested their grief at the impending departure of Her, whom they recognized as the Lady and the honor of all creation. The most wonderful sign of this general mourning among the creatures was that the light of the sun, the moon and the stars was diminished and on the day of her Transition they were eclipsed as at the death of the Redeemer of the world. Although many of the wise and thoughtful men noticed these unwonted changes in the celestial orbs, all were ignorant of the cause, and could only express their astonishment.

The devout Queen resolved to take leave of the holy places before her departure into heaven, and having obtained the consent of Saint John she left the house with him and with the thousand angels of her guard. Although these sovereign princes had always served and accompanied her in all her errands, occupations and journeys, without having absented themselves for one moment since the instant of her birth; yet on this occasion they manifested themselves to Her with greater beauty and refulgence, as if they felt special joy in seeing themselves already at the beginning of her last journey into heaven. The heavenly Princess, setting aside human occupations in order to enter upon her journey to the real and true fatherland, visited all the memorable places of our Redemption, marking each with the sweet abundance of her tears, recalling the sorrowful memories of what her Son there suffered, and fervently renewing its effects by most fervent acts of love, clamors and petitions for all the faithful, who should devoutly and reverently visit these holy places during the future ages of the Church. On Calvary she remained a longer time, asking of her Divine Son the full effects of His redeeming death for all the multitudes of souls there snatched from destruction. The ardor of her ineffable charity during this prayer rose to such

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a pitch, that it would have destroyed her life, if it had not been sustained by divine power…Then She again charged the holy angels to assist Her in the custody of those sacred places, to inspire with holy thoughts all the faithful who should visit them with devotion, so that they might know and esteem properly the admirable blessing of the Redemption wrought thereon. She charged them also with the defense of those sanctuaries; and if the temerity and the crimes of men had not demerited this favor, without a doubt the holy angels would have warded off the profanations of the heathens and the infidels. [A reference to the collective sins of Jews, Christians, and Muslims in that holy land.] *Even as it is, they defend them in many ways to the present day.*

As her final days approached, the Blessed Virgin resolved to formally make a last will and testament, which re-affirmed her deepest humility before the triune God. *When She manifested this most prudent wish to the Lord, He deigned to approve of it by His own royal presence. For this purpose, with myriads of attending angels, the three Persons of the most blessed Trinity descended to the oratory of their Daughter and Spouse, and when the Queen had adored the infinite Being of God, she heard a voice speaking to her: "Our chosen Spouse, make thy last will as thou desirest, for We shall confirm it and execute it entirely by our infinite power." The most prudent Mother remained for some time lost in the profoundness of her humility, seeking to know first the will of the Most High before she should manifest her own. The Lord responded to her modest desires and the person of the Father said to her: "My Daughter, thy will shall be pleasing and acceptable to Me; for thou art not wanting in the merits of good works in parting from this mortal life, that I should not satisfy thy desires." The same encouragement was given to Her by the Son and the Holy Ghost. Therewith the most blessed Mary made her will in this form: "Highest Lord and eternal God, I, a vile wormlet of the earth, confess and adore Thee with all the reverence of my inmost soul as the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, three Persons distinct in one undivided and eternal essence, one substance, one in infinite majesty of attributes and perfection. I confess Thee as the one true Creator and Preserver of all that has being. In Thy kingly presence I declare and say that my last will is this: Of the goods of mortal life and of the world in which I live, I possess none that I can leave; for never have I possessed or loved anything beside Thee, Who art my good and all my possession. To the heavens, the stars and planets, to the elements and all creatures in them I give thanks, because according to thy will they have sustained me without my merit, and lovingly I desire and ask them to serve and praise Thee in the offices and ministries assigned to them, and that they continue to sustain and benefit my brethren and fellowmen. In order that they may do it so much the better, I renounce and assign to mankind the possession, and as far as possible, the dominion of them, which Thy Majesty has given me over these irrational creatures, so that they may now serve and sustain my fellowmen. Two tunics and a cloak, which served to cover me, I leave to John for his disposal, since I hold him as a son. My body I ask the earth*

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to receive again for thy service, since it is the common mother and serves Thee as Thy creature; my soul, despoiled of its body and of all visible things, O my God, I resign into thy hands, in order that it may love and magnify Thee through all Thy eternities. My merits and all the treasures, which with Thy grace through my works and exertions I have acquired, I leave to the holy Church, my mother and my mistress, as my residuary heiress, and with Thy permission I there deposit them, wishing them to be much greater. And I desire that before all else they redound to the exaltation of Thy holy Name and procure the fulfillment of Thy will on earth as it is done in heaven, and that all the nations come to the knowledge, love and veneration of Thee, the true God. In the second place, I offer these merits for my masters the Apostles and priests, of the present and of the future ages, so that in view of them Thy ineffable clemency may make them apt ministers, worthy of their office and state, filled with wisdom, virtue and holiness, by which they may edify and sanctify the souls redeemed by Thy Blood. In the third place, I offer them for the spiritual good of my devoted servants, who invoke and call upon me, in order that they may receive thy protection and grace, and afterwards eternal life. In the fourth place, I desire that my services and labors may move Thee to mercy toward all the sinning children of Adam, in order that they may withdraw from their sinful state. From this hour on I propose and desire to continue my prayers for them in Thy Divine Presence, as long as the world shall last. This, Lord and my God, is my last will, always subject to Thy own." At the conclusion of this testament of the Queen, the most blessed Trinity approved and confirmed it; and Christ the Redeemer, as if authorizing it all, witnessed it by writing in the heart of his Mother these words: "Let it be done as thou wishest and ordainest." If all we children of Adam, and especially we who are born in the law of grace, had no other obligation toward the most blessed Mary than this of having been constituted heirs of her immense merits and of all that is mentioned in this short and mysterious testament, we could never repay our debt, even if in return we should offer our lives and endure all the sufferings of the most courageous martyrs and saints. I do not compare them with the infinite merits and treasures left by Christ our Savior in the Church, because that is not possible. But what excuse or pretense have the reprobate, who avail themselves neither of the one nor the other? All of them they despise, forget and squander. What torment and despair will be theirs, when they unavailingly come to know that they have lost forever such great blessings and treasures for a momentary delight? Let them confess the justice and equity with which they are chastised and cast off by the Lord and His loving Mother, whom they despised in such foolish temerity.

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