THE GENEALOGY OF SAINT JOACHIM AND SAINT ANNE

HOLY SCRIPTURES pass over in profound silence alike the most holy life and illustrious names of Joachim and Anne, the illustrious parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God. Adoring with most profound respect the conduct of the Sovereign author of the sacred volumes, I think that the omission of the names and heroic deeds was to leave the history of such progenitors for those annals and that volume, where with most brilliant lights are inscribed the lives of the heroes who have most illustrated the world with his dignity, his ministry, and his example.

This providence of heaven is seen even in the Only-begotten of the Father, Jesus Christ, of whose life, for the long space of thirty years, we simply know that he vouchsafed to be obedient to his parents. Scarcely any notice have we of the words and actions of the Blessed Virgin, in the seventy-two years that she lived among mortals. Of Saint Joseph (whose life we must suppose filled with wonderful events in consequence of his sacred ministry) there is little that we know with positive certainty. And so we must confess that the whole life of the greatest personages of the Church is concealed in an abyss of modesty and silence.

Nevertheless the Catholic Church, enlightened by a constant tradition, holds for certain that Joachim and Anne were the real names of the parents of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Hence Saint Joachim as well as Saint Anne -were most noble, being descended in the tribe of Judea from the blood of David : because of Levi, the son of Melchi, a descendant of David by the branch of Nathan was born Panter, father of Bipanter whose son Saint Joachim was, according to the account of Saint John Damascenus. On the other hand, Nathan by his wife Mary had three daughters, the first of whom was called Mary like her mother, the second Sobe, and the third Anne, the glorious mother of the Blessed Virgin Mary.  
  
The sacred doctors, relying, it is believed, on ancient traditions, affirm that Anne and Joachim led a most holy life, and have sufficient reason to affirm it, because the eternal wisdom and admirable providence of God having chosen them as progenitors of the Mother of the monarch of the universe, Jesus Christ, they could not but have been eminent in every virtue. The adorable Trinity, which had destined them to be parents of the queen of the universe, wished to try the firmness and constancy of their resignation, by afflicting them for the space of twenty years with an ignominious barrenness, which prevented their enjoying the fruit and blessing of their most chaste matrimony. But though the fecundity of nature was wanting, there was not wanting the proper spirit to recur humbly and fervently to the ancient mercies of heaven, whither they perpetually sent their sighs and prayers in order to obtain a child, whose birth might deliver them from the penalty and confusion of sterility, then considered among the Jews as a malediction and an infamy. The Almighty hearkened benignantly to their prayers, and on a certain occasion when Saint Joachim was praying on a hill of the desert, and Saint Anne under a laurel tree in her garden, with eyes lovingly raised to heaven they were consoled by a vehement inspiration which assured them that they should behold the fulfilment of their desires.  This favor happened on the eighth of the month of December, and on the eighth of the following September was born a daughter whom they called Anne giving her the name of her maternal grandmother. Had they done nothing but become parents\* of the empress of the universe they would have exceeded all the inhabitants of the earth ; because when we say that the Mother of God was born of Joachim and Anne, we say all that the mind can comprehend

.Having then obtained a daughter who exceeded the greatness of their expectations and desires (A. M. 3985-6) they educated her in the bosom of virtue, and when she was three years old, they presented her to the Lord in the temple, sacrificing in that amiable and precious treasure their heart and the consolation of their age. Both Anne and Joachim knew that that child was an excellent gift of God, and hence they freely restored her to the same Lord from whom they had received her, to be brought up with the other maidens in the temple. Never since the foundation of the world was a more agreeable or a more precious holocaust offered to the Almighty.

When the Virgin reached the age of fourteen, her parents, who, according to some writers, were still alive,  by divine inspiration betrothed her to Saint Joseph. Saint Joachim lived, according to the opinion of some writers, eighty years, and Saint Anne seventy-nine ; hence it is conjectured that they died after the birth of the Messias. What gives some probability to this opinion is the advanced age of these saints, and some ancient paintings which represent them alive after the birth of Jesus, the obscurity of history which gives no light to determine this, and the divine goodness which would not apparently deny them this consolation after twenty years of confusion and shameful sterility, and other reasons which we omit, not to fail in the brevity of a compendious description.

Nothing is known on this point, and it would be conjecture to state as certain what cannot be positively ascertained. We can only believe and advance that they were the parents of the Blessed Virgin, Mother of God : a felicity which would render probable the presence of Jesus, Mary and Joseph with all the heavenly court, at their passage to another life. Saint Joachim died on the ninth of March, according to the account of some historians, and Saint Anne on the twenty-sixth of July. It is nevertheless very difficult to state the year and all the circumstances of their death. The fact is, that the knowledge of these things is reserved for eternity.

Divine Providence disposed that the feast of the glorious Saint Anne should be celebrated in the Church many years before that of her illustrious consort, Saint Joachim. In the East and in the West Saints have composed most elegant homilies to extol her dignity and surpassing virtues. The faithful show their veneration by claiming to possess some of her most precious relics. France glories in possessing her sacred body, of which many cities in Germany boast of possessing portions. The nuptial ring which Saint Joachim gave Saint Anne is preserved at Rome in a church dedicated to the mother of our Lady. Her miracles, which are innumerable and worthy of eternal remembrance, have been described by Trithemius, and later still by the Bollandists

.Ancient historians tell us that the Emperor Justinian I, about the year 550, reared a magnificent and costly church in her honor at Constantinople. Finally, all that love and revere the Blessed Virgin Mary, have increased and promoted in every land devotion to her most holy mother. Our fore fathers showed their devotion by composing in honor of Saint Anne a simple office such as was used in that golden age.

The feast of Saint Joachim, which began in the West with but little solemnity under the pontificate of Julius I, has received greater dignity in these later times; for Pope Gregory XV, evincing a singular love and veneration for this glorious parent of Mary, ordered his feast to be celebrated as a double. The saint is entitled to our veneration, for, as Saint John Damascenus says, if we consider well the dignity of Saint Anne's spouse, that progenitor of Christ, the human heart cannot but be inflamed with intense desire of honoring him with signal marks of love and serving him with tenderness.

The body of this most happy saint is said to be preserved at Venice. If this is well founded, the noble Venetians should preserve it in a reliquary of finest gold, studded with diamonds and the most precious gems of the East. His glory cannot but be most exalted; for even in heaven, according to the pious John Gereon, he formed with Saint Anne, his daughter Mary and Saint Joseph, the family of Jesus Christ.

We should, therefore, have great confidence in his intercession, hoping to be rewarded for our devotion with abundant favors.

Source: The Life of the Blessed Virgin Mary, by Monsignor Gentilucci, 1856