

J. M. J.

CIRCULAR LETTER No. 98

OF THE

VERY REVEREND SUPERIOR GENERAL

TO THE

Congregation of the Holy Cross.

PARIS, December 15th, 1879.

REV. FATHERS AND BELOVED CHILDREN IN JESUS CHRIST:

This time I shall anticipate your pious wishes for a happy New Year, and offer you in advance *mes vœux de Bonne année*, even more fervently than ever, because of my constantly increasing conviction that our hopes of salvation, as a Religious Congregation, through the times we live in, lie absolutely and exclusively in the observance of our Rules.

It is true, that at all times, the love of the Rule has been for all exemplary Religious the beginning, as well as the unmistakable sign of a saintly life. But to-day, when the worldly live only to enjoy the comfort and the ease which money can procure, it becomes a necessity, such as never existed before, especially for us Religious of the Holy Cross, to seek our safety under the shelter of our Rules, instead of conciliating by degrees whatever is characteristic of a religious life, with the spirit and manners and ways of the world. Experience teaches us on this point a lesson of which none of us should easily lose sight; viz., that for one vocation we may expose, by enforcing too rigidly the observance of the Rule, we may ruin half a dozen by an unwise and dangerous weakness or inattention, in surrounding them with comfort at the expense of the spirit of the Rule, if not by a criminal neglect or open violation of its letter. And what is worse yet: for one who goes from too strict requirements, and likely delivers the Community from a poor subject, half a dozen who might have proved real acquisitions, if properly kept at first within the observance of what they had learned to practice and to love in their Novitiate, will gradually lose all zeal and fervor for their personal sanctification, and, from a sad want of a watchful eye over their failing regularity, will soon become, not only nominal, but dangerous members of the Community, until they are forced to leave it, which will always be too late.

The love of comfort, once introduced, and admitted into a religious soul, will soon destroy even the best elements of that soul. It will begin with one thing, viz., with a desire of a better table, then of better clothes, then of a better room, then of more leisure. You have already a costly Religious. Alas! how many poor Religious have been ruined by such unchecked commencements! Ah, beware of all tendencies or inclinations to any indulgence of nature. We are Religious to struggle against it continually and everywhere. What reconciles me here, and somewhat makes up for all I suffer from the painful separation from all I love here below, is my modest religious little room, 15x12. I prefer it by far to my princely suite of rooms at Notre Dame and St. Mary's, which are to me a continual reproach; for they seem to say that, if there were any merit in me, there would be no need of showing me off before the world by such exterior surroundings, by which I am made before keen eyes an empty-headed and vain man, taking pride in what men of real worth despise.

I have seen many a room in Rome still preserved in the exact state in which the saintly occupants had lived and died. What a burning condemnation of our vanity! I wrote once from Waukesha that I would never occupy again those rooms at Notre Dame if they were not stripped of all unnecessary ornaments: they underwent some little changes; but I repeat the same again. Give me one single, simple room, such as I have here in Paris, or in Rome, and I will enjoy it. Oh! let us try to be like all true servants of God, modest in our wants, easily satisfied, always afraid to indulge ourselves unnecessarily, never dreaming that we can make ourselves happy otherwise than by a strict imitation of those we admire as living models of humility and modesty in their tastes and habits, of regularity and devotedness in the discharge of their duties, full of respect and veneration for those who hold for them God's own place, and who day after day perfect thus their claims upon the esteem and gratitude of their associates for ever.

E. SORIN, C. S. C.,  
Superior-General.