

J. M. J.

CIRCULAR LETTER No. 114

OF THE

VERY REV. SUPERIOR GENERAL

TO THE

Congregation of the Holy Cross.

NOTRE DAME, Octave of the Epiphany, Jan. 13, 1882.

REV. FATHERS AND DEAR CHILDREN IN JESUS CHRIST:

When I sent you my last greetings of the 22d ult., I thought I had anticipated your best wishes of the season; but I failed then to anticipate the pleasure I was to realize from the expressions of sentiments contained in the voluminous New Year's correspondence I received since, from both Continents. It seems now, as though I had interviewed everyone, at leisure, even those at a distance, and read in their letters the real feelings of their honest and loving hearts, as plainly as I could see them on the happy countenances of those I met at home. To all equally, I now feel obliged to offer my most sincere thanks, and to say to each: "This acknowledgment is for yourself personally." Such letters and addresses I keep as a rich and precious treasure to which I may return for new enjoyments. The heart has its needs as well as the body.

In the incessant anxieties, inseparable from my charge, and known only to God, the actual assurance of our truly sympathetic and perfect union of mind and heart in *charitate Christi*, goes a great way, as a soothing balm and a cheering boon, to keep up weak human nature, against the crushing weight of sudden and multiplying trials, or ever-growing threats of even greater evils, in a near future, from which, society at large, can scarcely be saved, but by a miracle. *La Povera Francia!* said the Saintly Pio Nono, let us pray for her—we could not forget her even for a day, in our prayers. May the Blessed Mary, whose kingdom France always was—*Regnum Galliae, Regnum Mariae*, save her from ruin! It is on this Providential assistance our confidence rests for our temporal salvation as a Congregation. We know "that hope never confoundeth; that we must glory in the hope of the glory of the sons of God; and that, even against hope, we must believe in hope: *spes contra spem*."

Such sentiments, unfortunately, are becoming, alas! too rare, even among Christians; but in a Community, they are happily fostered by union and charity: there and there only lies our strength, our real power. The Month of the Holy Infancy brings us in close contact with the Crib; Bethlehem is becoming daily more and more a delightful rendezvous to our faithful souls, a House of Bread in which we feel every want of our eager and panting hearts. Each time we approach it, in silence and in faith, we find in it the Divine Babe, lying in the Manger, stretching unto us His loving little arms, soliciting our love and, as it were, saying already, with an accent of a heavenly sweetness which none can resist: "Amen I say unto you, unless you become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. He that shall receive one such little child in My name, receiveth Me. But he that shall scandalize one of these little ones that believe in Me, it were better for him that a mill-stone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Take heed that you despise not one of these little ones: for I say to you, that their angels in heaven always see the Face of My Father who is in heaven. It is not the will of your Father who is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish. Let little children come unto Me and forbid them not."

Here is what fastens us to the mysterious Crib. Oh, the admirable new Doctrine! Oh, the lovely, the Divine Teacher! How could we express what we feel towards Him? For centuries, and even now in China and wherever the Gospel is unknown, children are treated as little brutes. But since the day God Himself appeared under the form of a Babe in the Manger, in a stable, and made the solemn declaration that whoever receives one such little child in His name, receives Him, the God-Child, what a change! We wonder, sometimes, at the devoted zeal of saintly teachers for the training of their pupils: I wonder myself why every teacher who once knelt at the Crib of Bethlehem does not evince the same unbounded devotedness.

Imagine, when kneeling enraptured before the Crib, to see the Blessed Mother offering you the Divine Child, to hold in your arms, for a while, as she did to some favorite saints: the marvel would be as it always was to my mind, how such a favor could be borne and not burst instantly the poor human heart. Or, again, fancy to

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hear that Divine Babe say to you, with an accent that cannot be described, while turning His eyes from you to the Blessed Virgin: "Here is thy Mother:" and then, looking to His Mother: "Here is thy son." Could you hear it and live? With God's assistance you could; not otherwise, it seems to me. And yet, when I turn from the Crib to the Tabernacle and the Communion Table, I understand, I realize, that I am favored, above all the privileged visitors of the Stable of Bethlehem—Bethlehem, indeed, was the beginning of the manifestation of God's love for man; the Last Supper, in the Cenacle, was the crowning of that infinite love of God for me. Once in their life, the shepherds and the Magi beheld Him in the Manger; but I, every day or every other day, I, poor sinner receive Him, not in my arms, but in my own bosom, in my very heart, so truly that I may say with St. Paul: "I live: no, not I, but Christ Himself lives in me!" O wonder! The very angels adore Him in my heart. How shall I thank Thee?

But, what is the consequence, the real sentiment forced upon us by the contemplation of the mystery proposed to our faith, since the 25th of December? Most undoubtedly, that a grand, a noble task has been assigned to us as educators of Christian youth: a task, the importance of which none of us can duly appreciate and for which we shall never be able, here below, to return proper thanks to Heaven: for we have been singled out, to take charge of a kingly race, and train it to sit and reign forever on imperishable thrones. Such is our office; such our responsibilities; can a teaching Congregation overrate the importance or the sublimity of its mission? Where shall we find words to thank Heaven for our beautiful vocation? . . . But, where words fail, deeds must speak the gratitude of a generous and willing soul. Hitherto, I fear, I never proved, O God, that I appreciated my holy call! But henceforth, with the help of Thy grace, O Lord, I wish, I mean to show that I value my vocation. I would not be ungrateful to a child for a look of love; nor even to an enemy, for a favor: how could I repay my Father who is in heaven with open ingratitude?

But in a Community like ours, all are not actually teaching—what of this? In the human body, says St. Paul, here are many members, yet but one body: (See the whole of ch. 12, 1st Cor.)

In a clock, the hand pointing out the hour, is alone seen; but that same hand could not even move, were it not for a number of inside wheels which no one can see, though they are all, even the smallest, equally indispensable to the intended effect. The same is true of every artistical mechanism of whatever magnitude. What appears outside would not be worth any attention, were it not for the unseen agency of the internal combination. Hence, no cause for regrets or jealousy. Those of our members who spend the whole day in the class-room, need their regular meals and many things else, without which they could not teach long or well. In our largest Houses, Superiors might almost dispense with the presence of the Faculty, two days in the week: could they dispense with our unpretending cooks as well? Could they even dispense them from rising earlier than the Community? And yet, these devoted members are scarcely ever remembered but when they fail to suit our tastes and exigencies. My heart always went with the hardest workers, the most devoted.

When the Meditation-bell is heard in the morning, we all instinctively hasten to come and kneel down before the Tabernacle, around which the angels have been watching the whole night. What a delight for each of us, especially through this lovely season of the Holy Infancy, to bow before the Infant Saviour and offer Him the homage of our hearts, the first and only thing Himself cares for! We assure Him that we come with the Shepherds and the Magi to adore Him, and take His orders for the day. It seems, I hear a voice from the Manger "Lovest thou Me?" and a reply: "Thou knowest, O Lord, that I love Thee." And again: "Feed My lambs; for each of them I came to this stable; for them I will lay down My life. Go, and take of them the same care as thou wouldst take of Me." O sweet Jesus! how can I ever thank Thee? I go, my Lord; I leave Thee here to find Thee there. "Thou hast opened the eyes of a poor blind one," do Thou now "open my senses and my lips," that I may spend myself in full upon each of my precious little ones, for the sake of my sweet Jesus. Assist me—*adjuva me*—until I return and report to Thee.

\* In the *Scholastic* of to-morrow, you will find a recent and striking example of the dreadful fate awaiting unfaithful Religious. That notorious apostate, Gavazzi, was lecturing in South Bend five months ago. He is now condemned, says the *London Universe*, by the Tribunal of the Seine, to thirteen months prison, for immorality. Unfaithful Religious! What a curse!

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