

J. M. J.

CIRCULAR LETTER NO. 10

OF THE

Very Rev. SUPERIOR GENERAL

OF THE

Congregation of the Holy Cross.

NOTRE DAME IND., DECEMBER 20, 1886,

FEAST OF THE EXPECTATION, OF THE BIRTHGIVING OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

REV. FATHERS AND DEARLY-BELOVED CHILDREN IN JESUS CHRIST:

This happy morning, it was my good fortune to celebrate Holy Mass in our precious Chapel of Loreto. What a treasure for St. Mary's! Three times in my life I enjoyed the unspeakable delight to visit the sacred original Sanctuary wherein the Word was made Flesh, and dwelt amongst us. Even on Holy Thursday, I was permitted to say Mass in the most venerable temple in the world, as is written on the entrance to this Sanctuary. To appreciate the favor to the best of my ability, I had made within its precincts a retreat of three days. I will never forget the joys of that fourth day in Holy Week at Loreto. But this morning, while offering the Holy Sacrifice, and afterwards kneeling in thanksgiving at the very place where the Blessed Virgin herself knelt, as tradition has it, at the solemn moment of the Incarnation of the Eternal Word—*et Verbum caro factum est*—all my feelings of old, in the *Santa Casa*, seemed to revive in my heart. Oh! how happy Faith makes us sometimes even in this valley of tears! What earthly enjoyments can compare with those of Divine Faith? All sources of human or worldly happiness, however great, would fade away before a single ray of the Eternal Light, or of the infallible promises of what awaits us in Heaven.

An honest friend, now a millionaire, writing me last week, said that all he had in his pocket when he came to South Bend, in 1846, was two dollars. I know another man who had that much less when he reached the same place, four years before. All our millionaires in South Bend started alike, with nearly nothing. Has their happiness increased at the same rate as their wealth? Very few men have found gold mines to be mines of real enjoyments. Personal experience is a teacher whose lessons should be listened to. As a rule, it confirms the Divine declaration: *Beati pauperes*.

On our first arrival here, Notre Dame forcibly reminded us of Bethlehem. The winter was the severest and longest we have ever seen. We were in complete destitution. Even at Holy Mass, before taking the Precious Blood, I had to clasp the Sacred Cup in my hands, in order to melt the frozen Sacred Species. We suffered, but never felt happier in our life. What made us joyous and happy in our needs and privations of every sort? Faith alone. Before the end of the winter we had erected a new church, 50x25 feet—a log church, of course, suitable to our means and wants; we called it a grand building, and felt proud of it. By Faith the lot of the poor is made as rich as that of the possessor of worldly goods, said a philosopher of the present age. Yes, indeed, and far richer and better. Give the needy or the sufferer, the certainty of a heavenly future, of an eternal reward for patience, of an endless paradise; what a magnificent exchange for his momentary trials! Then he realizes the rich, the celestial beauty of the infallible declaration of the Divine Master, whose sublime teachings were begun in utter destitution, in the grotto of Bethlehem.

Excuse this long preamble; for it is nothing more than a preamble to the great subject I wish to introduce to your serious consideration, at this most important epoch in our Religious existence. I am aware of the fact that the close of the year is availed of by common friendship to express mutual good wishes for special blessings upon a new year. I anticipate your filial expressions and fervent prayers in my behalf, and in advance I thank you, each and all, for such gratifying evidences of devoted piety. Once more, a thousand thanks for the same, with my own best wishes for your greatest happiness!

To assert and prove to you that we have reached a state of society, which none of us ever saw, or ever imagined, would be like carrying a lamp in the full blaze of the noon-day sun. We all know it and realize it. Rumors of war from the East; new threats against our Holy Church and its Supreme Head; actual persecutions of all religious institutions; disturbances of peace in our midst, from

all directions; the bold advocacy of wild doctrines, subversive of the first elementary rights of society; dangers everywhere; security, God alone knows where. Such a state of things in its *ensemble*, is unprecedented and alarming to all serious minds. To-day, everyone is afraid of what may happen to-morrow. Who ever read or heard of such crimes, as our dailies relate each morning? But where is the remedy for such awful evils?

It is not within my province to name a cure for such social disturbances and calamities, and yet we must do our share towards removing the poison that visibly corrupts society and threatens ruin everywhere. Want of faith, sheer infidelity, and its necessary consequences, insubordination and rebellion—here is the enemy.

Let us understand fully and thoroughly the question now staring society in the face, as it never did before. From a Christian point of view, the civilized world is on the verge of ruin. The sick man of this generation is well-nigh beyond all hopes of recovery, save one which he will meet in his daily contact with the youth, the undefiled element, the only sound breath of a stainless heart, which can purify the vitiated atmosphere of the family. The child must be the salvation of the home-circle, or everything threatens universal ruin. Poor prospect, you will say, in the near future, when public atheistical schools send home every evening five or six emissaries of their infidelity, against our one who knows who created him and for what end he was created. Even so, one, out of five or six, will justify more readily than in the far East every sacrifice that may be required to secure the proper training and personal salvation of that priceless minority, without speaking of its direct and efficient influence on others. We must save our own flock, our lambs and sheep. Let our motto be, to save the child for the sake of the child, with well-grounded hopes that the same may save the family. Never before had the training of a child appeared more momentous in its results.

Never had a teacher of youth been more imperatively required to devote all his attention and exertions to the discharge of such a responsible duty. Children nowadays do not come to us simple-minded and easy to manage, as they were found twenty-five years ago; and yet, they have to be far better prepared to successfully meet the many exigencies of their future career in the world. Hence the evident increase in the double tax laid upon teachers of youth. When, again, you add thereto the well-known necessity of superior attainments to justly qualify the teachers of the day, you will acknowledge with me that teaching is by no means an ordinary task or a sinecure employment. To do it full justice, requires serious preparation, untiring devotedness, God's blessing, and a self-sacrificing spirit which saintly Religious alone, living by faith, can command.

Noble vocation! When was it more admirable or more precious? Never! But to correspond to it worthily, one must evidently be a religious—a model of regularity, of piety and fervor, of zeal for the salvation of souls, and of continual exertions to advance in virtue.

Before closing these lengthy remarks, I must once more call your attention to a most important and vital subject, wherein all, by prayer and personal efforts, may materially help the Congregation to fulfil God's holy designs. I mean a general resolve to try and procure vocations. In this, did not Our Blessed Lord give us an example to follow? Did He not Himself select and call His first disciples? The very expression He used, the *sequare Me*—or follow Me—is too well known and too positive to need any comment. After such an example, how can we remain indifferent, knowing, as we do, the immense need of the Congregation to meet the urgent requests, continually increasing, for new schools, and the special blessing we would confer on the precious souls we may thereby draw under the glorious bannier we have ourselves chosen. Is it not somewhat surprising that more vocations are habitually procured by our Religious who are not engaged in teaching, than by our teachers themselves? Where we find true piety, we find zeal. Besides, pious souls always leave behind, when retiring from the world, some attractive remembrances, which create and maintain aspirations to follow their edifying sacrifice.

From the above lines it will clearly be seen that the increased and still increasing number of pupils in our institutions, this year, while very gratifying in itself, adds not a little to our personal responsibilities, if we really intend doing each one of them full justice. Those in charge must, more than ever, prove themselves worthy of their titles, especially by an extended vigilance and unre-served devotedness to duty; subalterns should all be models of obedience and active co-operation. Oh! Let us pray for each other to Our Blessed Mother, especially for our dear brethren beyond the sea. Let all our Houses, more than ever, breathe, day and night, the spirit of prayer.

Again, a merry Christmas and a happy New Year, to each and to all the beloved children of our dear Family! A long and meritorious life to all, particularly to the old ones!

E. SORIN, C. S. C.,

*Superior-General.*