

J. M. J.

CIRCULAR LETTER NO. 21.

OF THE

Very Rev. SUPERIOR GENERAL

OF THE

Congregation of the Holy Cross.

NOTRE DAME, IND., DECEMBER 18, 1888.

REV. FATHERS AND DEAR CHILDREN IN JESUS CHRIST:

As we approach the end of this eventful year, my heart prompts me more and more irresistibly to unfold to you some of the feelings with which it is overflowing. Then do me the favor of listening to me for a few moments.

Last year was, indeed, a memorable one in my life. For nearly a week, at this time in December, it was my good fortune to kneel down for hours and hours, every day, before the manger and the cradle of the Divine Babe, the Son of God, born of the Virgin Mary, the Saviour of the world!

What a delightful week I spent there in Bethlehem praying to the Divine Child, as I had never done before, that He would be a Saviour to each member of our beloved Family, to all its precious friends, and to the dear souls He would intrust to our care! At times it seemed to me you were all there with me, enjoying the same unspeakable delights, looking most earnestly and lovingly to the beautiful and sweet face of the Divine Infant. I fancy yet that I never saw you so completely, so thoroughly permeated with ineffable happiness.

Now, I call you to meet me once more in that blessed spot, in spirit, to kneel down before Him in profound adoration, to thank Him for His boundless favors and ever-increasing blessings, and to repeat to Him again and again how grateful we feel to be permitted to say from our inmost souls: Oh, how good it is for us to be here!

Next to the sacred tabernacle, in which He resides day and night, for love of us, where is the spot in this vale of tears where a pious and devoted Religious, a loving heart can enjoy more abundantly the marvellous teachings of our holy faith than in the House of the Living Bread before the crib of the Divine Infant? The simple remembrance of Bethlehem, when seriously entertained, fills our mind and heart with an unspeakable joy.

Pause awhile in spirit and kneel reverently before the cradle, which for 1888 years has, like a magnet, drawn from far and near so many millions of fervent Christian souls; fix your eyes upon the lovely face of the Divine Infant who smiles on you so benignly; who opens His tender arms to press your heart to His own loving Heart, to sanctify it, to enrich it with priceless gifts; declaring, though silently, yet so eloquently, that it is for you He has come, to save you from an endless ruin, and to open to you the gates of heaven; that His delight is to be with you for ever! Oh, what an enrapturing sight! what an ecstasy in its enjoyment for a pious, a true religious!

The days of terror, of lightning and thunder are over. God Himself has come in person, not as of old on Mount Sinai to speak to His people in His awful majesty, but in a stable, in the form of a sweet little infant, the embodiment of love declaring Himself our own loving Brother,—calling upon us to come unto Him with boundless confidence. *Venite ad Me omnes qui laboratis et onerati estis, et Ego reficiam vos.*

Here, in Bethlehem, in a stable, in a manger, God reveals Himself as the God of love, the essence of charity. Here for the first time He comes to us under the loveliest form of a sweet and beautiful child! No punishment, no anger, no displeasure is threatening: all is love, boundless love. Who could fear anything from such a heavenly Visitor, who comes to us as a most affectionate Brother, who desires, above all, to fill our hearts with His Divine charity, and bring us to His glorious kingdom, to enjoy with Him an eternal happiness? Who could resist such charms, such admirable attractions? Can we doubt His Divine character, the Divine mission He opens in His cradle of poverty? Hear the angelical choir singing over and above the place of His humble birth: *Gloria in excelsis Deo, et in terra pax hominibus bonæ voluntatis.* Very soon the Eternal Father will declare it solemnly from above: *Hic est Filius Meus dilectus in quo Mihi bene complacui.*

O my God! the true believer will say, my sweet and beloved Saviour, I adore Thee, I love Thee with my whole heart, laid in this poor manger, where Thou hast chosen to reveal to me Thy infinite charity. I love Thee, I love Thee! Who could remain indifferent to such manifestation of Divine love now dawning upon mankind? The shepherds will promptly obey the summons of the angels and repair to the stable, where a Saviour is born unto them. The kings from the East will arrive and prostrate themselves before the same Divine Child. Shall we not hasten to join in the same worship of the Son of God made man to make us eternally happy? It seems I hear everyone voicing the sentiments of all the dear family; and exclaiming: O my God, my greatest delight will be to visit again and again thy Holy Crib; there to meditate on the mystery of Thy love; there to learn how to acknowledge and return the same Divine charity. Henceforth I must live by love.

To live by love, what an admirable and celestial existence! But, indeed, it should be the undying resolve of every true religious who once knelt before the Holy Crib, the bright sanctuary of infinite charity. To live by love in order to return God's love, is the noblest aspiration of a generous, a loving heart. Here is the place it should originate in an appreciative soul, as it did in the manger from the Heart of the Divine Child to the heart of man. To live by love and from love is an angelical life upon earth. It is living for God: making Him the centre of all our aspirations; the cause and the end of all our acts and intentions. What energy, what fortitude, what self sacrifice it must generate and sustain! What resignation in trials! What disdain for vain and deceitful enjoyments! What horror for sin! To a loving soul, in adoration at the crib, a single smile from the sweet face of the Divine Child, covers with a sudden and deep shadow, all the glittering or frightful aspects of this world. What are the praises and honors of this life compared to a smile from the God of peace?

In every House of the Congregation a crib will be erected with all possible care and industry. With what joyful hearts shall we not visit it day after day, not only during the octave, but throughout the whole period consecrated to the Holy Infancy! The humble shepherds and the wise men will set before us an edifying example; but our best models are Mary and Joseph. Oh, with what reverence and love they welcome the new-born Divine Babe! With them we will come to adore and love Him, never missing a single exercise to the end of the precious period which must prove to us all a marked renewal of fervor, a real advance in perfection. Each new visit will add to our happiness, by increasing our piety. Each time you will look at the sweet face of the Divine Child, I imagine, each one of you will hear Him say the same as he did to St. Peter: "Lovest thou Me?" May you return the same answer: "Yes, Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee." But He repeated the same question again, and even a third time, so great was His delight to receive again the same most sincere assurance that he loved Him.

I trust your beautiful devotion towards the dear Souls in Purgatory, will fully manifest itself each time you kneel at the Holy Crib.

Finally, I close this long address with a heartfelt and fervent prayer to Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, that you may all enjoy a merry Christmas and a happy New Year, to the fullest satisfaction of your own souls.

Your devoted

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