

CIRCULAR LETTER No. 87

OF THE

VERY REVEREND SUPERIOR-GENERAL

TO THE

Congregation of the Holy Cross.

ST. BRIGITTA, ROME, March 31, 1878.

REV. FATHERS AND DEARLY BELOVED CHILDREN IN JESUS CHRIST:

I have been here over a month and a half; and although I have frequently written home since I arrived, many among you, I am sure, have scarcely heard anything of my movements these last three months, and I feel anxious to show them that although absent in body from our dear American shores I have not so soon forgotten and obliterated from my mind the interesting family I have left behind in the far West. Need I say it—to forget the New World, where I have spent more than thirty-six years of my life, and where Divine Providence has blessed me with so many devoted children, whose affections I reciprocate so deeply in my own heart,—to forget so many familiar faces and precious souls would be an impossibility, even if I would try it. Nature has not endowed me with such a power of blotting out at will from my memory any one once loved. I know there are men who can thus spare themselves much annoyance, living *au jour le jour*, with no reminiscence of the past to divert their attention from the present; they enjoy the day as it comes, undisturbed. Alas! not so with me! I never learned how to separate the present from the past, except in the interests of those I lived with. It is sweet to forget an injury; but it has always seemed to me well worth the aspirations of a Christian soul to imitate Him who never turns His eyes from a meritorious heart, even when forgotten by it. God has given me nearly eleven hundred spiritual children, and He alone knows what a depth of affection He has laid in my heart for each of them. Whether in life or in death, we shall remain inseparable in the bonds of His undying charity. Let this assurance ever console us in our momentary separation. Here, especially, my delight is to go from shrine to shrine, recommending to the Madonna or some great Saint the general wants of the family at large, and the secret needs of each member of it, as memory prompts me. Thus separation is no loss to any, but a blessing to many; the heart may bleed, but the soul is enriched, and what comparison can be established between what passes as a shadow and what remains forever? My time has not been lost.

I have here a full list of all the Religious of the Holy Cross; I carry it with me everywhere; and whenever I enter a celebrated church or chapel, I take the dear roll in my hands, and as soon as I make sure that I am listened to, I begin my litany and go through. Every man has his own devotion: This is one of mine; and in calling each name, I intend securing to its bearer something worth coming so far to obtain. Thus I redeem my pledge, and try to avoid even the semblance of ingratitude towards those who pray so fervently for me. Ingratitude! "The burning wind that dries up the very source of grace"! I fear it, towards God and man. The reproach of ingratitude should wither every sensible being. May Heaven ever preserve us from it! But what a delight for a generous soul to ponder over even the smallest favors received from God or our fellow-beings!

One of my first consolations since I am in Rome has been to reconsider, one by one, the twenty-one private audiences with which our saintly late Holy Father honored me since twenty-seven years. Such memories will never die away from my mind. Yes, indeed, in one sense, we have sustained an immense loss. But his death has most undoubtedly been his entrance into an endless life; an incomparable gain for himself, and consequently for all his children.

As I related to our dear "AVE MARIA," Bishop Dufal, Father Ferdinando Battista and myself, were admitted on the 6th instant to our first audience at the Vatican. The new Pope received us with such kindness and paternal benignity, such evidence of interest for our Congregation, such undeserved and unexpected effusion, that we felt astonished, and I did not know for a while whether he had not taken us for some other people. But very soon my doubts vanished before the various and direct questions he put to us concerning the nature, the origin, the development, the approbation, the different branches of the Congregation, the number of our Religious, that of our Establishments, particularly in the New World. He seemed to be delighted to learn that we were doing so much for the education of youth and the preaching of the Gospel by our missionaries; assured us most positively of God's abundant blessings on our labors; encouraged us to great hopes, and then showed what need the Church has of such laborers at this period of her existence, and finally blessed us with all his heart, and with us all our good Religious, our Houses, our pupils, and all our undertakings. He finally gave us his hand to kiss, allowed us to kiss the cross on his foot, and we retired perfectly charmed. Then the incident of the "AVE MARIA."

When we represented to the Cardinal Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of the Propaganda our apprehensions of trouble, in holding this summer our General Chapter in Paris, His Eminence understood us at once, and granted a postponement for two years, in hopes that peace shall be restored by that time to Europe.

This public revelation of an important measure, usually reserved to the General Administration, leads me to another, of a character equally grave and serious, and in which many will sincerely rejoice.

Considering the truly gratifying development which our Religious Family has gradually continued since ten years, especially in the Ecclesiastical branch, now nearly double what it was in 1868, I have resolved, after mature consideration and prayer, and due consultation here and in Paris, finally to carry out our original plan in the acquisition of our beautiful and venerated House of Sta. Brigitta, on the Piazza Farnese, and to open in its sacred walls, so dear to my soul, a Seminary of Higher Ecclesiastical Studies, for our own subjects, commencing next fall, preparatory for the Degrees. There is ample room here for six, without disturbing the fourteen or fifteen Rev. Jesuit Fathers occupying during the past three years the entire third story. My programme is already made: two professed from each Province, selected from among the most deserving that can be spared; their sojourn in Rome, to qualify them for the Degrees, will not exceed two years, taking into consideration their previous Theological studies, and the daily instructions they shall receive in the house. Such is Prof. De Angelis' declaration. \$500 will cover all the expenses of each student from the United States and Canada, from the day they leave home till their return. If they are already Priests, as would be desirable, they might easily secure before starting a sufficient number of intentions for Masses, from their own friends, to defray all the outlay of the two years' absence. Having five altars in the chapel and rooms of Sta. Brigitta, all the Masses can be said in one hour. The plan pleases exceedingly our highest Protectors and friends in Rome, and is considered a step of great importance in the best direction. I therefore beg of the Provincial Councils to inform me of the choice they have made for this year, bearing in mind that it must be a reward of both virtue and ability.

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