

J. M. J.

CIRCULAR LETTER NO. 120

OF THE

VERY REV. SUPERIOR GENERAL

OF THE

Congregation of the Holy Cross.

FEAST OF ST. JOHN THE EVANGELIST, Dec. 27, 1882.

REV. FATHERS AND BELOVED CHILDREN IN JESUS CHRIST:

The approach of a new year affords me a fresh opportunity of again assuring you of my best wishes for your greatest happiness. Time passes like a dream; eternity alone should fix our attention.

Illusions are common everywhere, especially in our age of levity and of thoughtless rush towards enjoyments of nature. Such has always been the real status of the world; never more so, however, than at this hour. But, what may appear somewhat surprising, the same fatal evil is found even in the Religious life. Here, indeed, it is abnormal; for communities should be, first of all, a safe guarantee against the illusions of the world. For why did we leave the world to retire into a Community? Chiefly because we had seen, in the light of the Gospel, the vanity of the illusions of the world. To be consequent with ourselves, should we not have tried to keep both our minds and our hearts forever proof against such well-known and dangerous temptations?

The answer is obvious; but, does it rest on real and undeniable facts? Before an impartial jury, even of our best associates, who know us well, what would be the verdict? But, if we feel apprehensive, and, for reasons of our own, rather decline any such human judgments, there is a Court where we shall have, some day, to appear, each and all; a Tribunal whose decisions are irrevocable as well as infallible; would it not be a wholesome thought, in our next monthly retreat, to which the close of the year naturally adds such an especial importance, to transport ourselves seriously in spirit before that Supreme Judge whose scrutiny we shall have to stand, alas! perhaps, much sooner than we expect? If the fear of God's judgments, so different from man's views, has caused Saints, after years of a solitary and most penitential life, to shrivel, where can we place our rest and confidence?

It is not without reason or cause I entertain you to-day on such a subject. Rumors have reached me, of late, that I can scarcely believe; but they will justify me in trying to caution innocent souls against deception. From apostates we may look for anything; but from Religious, living members of a Community, we are not prepared to hear *that vows can be easily dispensed with*. St. Liguori thought differently, and he was not alone.

What I am going to say, I have first applied to myself, as I know I shall have my account to render, probably sooner than any one of you; an account, the very thought of which makes me shudder. I see myself; I see each one of you, standing alone, to be judged for an eternity! . . . Oh, the awful moment! No help will you be to me, no more than I can be to you. Personal merit alone will decide our lot forever. Oh! let me offer you now an acceptable, a saving aid. To-day, it is time yet; to-morrow may be too late: *Hodie, si vocem Domini audieritis, nolite obdurare corda vestra! The Judgment sat*

and the Books were opened. (Dan. vii, 10.) *The Lord is the God of judgment.* (Isaias, xxx, 18.) *Cui multum datum est, multum queretur ab eo.* (St. Luke, xii, 48.) Who has received more than Religious?

Suppose, then, you who read this, represent yourself, standing alone before God's Judgment-seat, trembling, shivering in apprehension; illusions are gone; Divine light is shining and revealing all in stern truth and reality. Oh, my God! who will stand it and live?

First of all, as a Religious, you must answer your Judge on your vows. They bound you before God, to whom you made them; their observance would have alone secured you the possession of heaven. You vowed holy obedience. Has your life since been one of obedience—continual, universal; and devoted obedience? edifying, exemplary for all? or, have you not rather chosen to do your own will? that *will* you had solemnly renounced and sacrificed? Christ's obedience was unto death; even to the death of the Cross. Where is your resemblance to your Model? Oh, what a sad series of dreadful illusions!

You had also vowed poverty. Here, again, Christ had taught you by example, from His first entrance into the world, to His last breath on Calvary; you vowed it, and the angels recorded it in the Book of Life. To the Saints the same vow was a prolific source of merits. They loved it; they delighted in its strictest observance; they never disposed of anything; they would not call a *pin* their property. To them, privations, want of comfort, destitution, were loved and blessed opportunities. But, alas! what a dreadful contrast! You have made the same precious vow, and this is nearly all! No! for, by its daily disregard and incessant violations, it has multiplied your sins, instead of increasing your merit. Regularly professed, you have lived for ease and enjoyments, and found your rest only in the want of nothing! So little satisfies modest desires; scarcely did you cover your expenses; and still you complained, as though you had vowed holy poverty on condition never to be left in any need. Worse again. Oh, how terribly you deceived yourself!

As to the third and beautiful vow of purity, the real gem of the religious life, we delight in the hope of being found true and spotless before God as before men, in keeping our sacred and angelical engagements. But when we look and see the immense ground it covers for merit and offence: acts, and words, thoughts, intentions and desires, who will stand it? Alas! even the senses, the faculties given us to bring grace to the soul, have brought Satan to defile its purity! Ah! to preserve to the end the freshness of the lily of a virginal heart, let us pray to the Virgin of virgins every day of our life; for we must all know that we carry, in frail hands, a most precious vase, of which a casual stumble may cause an irreparable loss, or even a vitiated breath forever destroy the heavenly fragrance and perfume.

These are only a few points among the many we shall have to answer, and yet they leave scarcely a doubt that we have hitherto lived too often in illusions, and not enough in reality. Good God! I see now the danger of my position. Alas! how blind I must have been! Seeking human praises; caring little to be a true Religious; satisfied enough with appearing good; fault-finding with all, except myself; taking counsel but of myself; freely disposing of the Congregation's funds; wasting and wasting, without concern for debts, scandals or ruin! With Thy holy grace, I will begin a new life: I will be a Religious, not only in name, but in serious earnestness. Alas! I may have caused, by my irreligious conduct, the eternal loss of some souls! I may have ruined, by my total want of religious spirit and observance of the Rules, not only my companions, but even the House I should have saved; my name should have been one of edification, esteem, and blessing. What is it, to those who know me best? Shall I carry to my grave nothing but the burden of my infidelities? My Lord and my God! I thank Thee for Thy long and merciful patience. This very moment, with Thy divine grace, I begin a new life. I will be a Religious, cost what it may! Grant me some days; I will repair the past; I will secure my eternity. May God bless this saving resolve!

Our dear associates in France continue in the same critical situation. See again Circular No. 105.

P. S. Have you forgotten to look for Postulants?

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

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