

Very Rev. SUPERIOR GENERAL

OF THE

Congregation of the Holy Cross.

BETHLEHEM, December 13, 1887.

REV. FATHERS AND BELOVED CHILDREN IN JESUS CHRIST:

Yes, it is from Bethlehem I write—the City of David, but, more than all, the House of the Living Bread!—the city where peace between Heaven and earth was first and solemnly proclaimed by the angelic choir, whose celestial accents ever since re-echo all over the globe, to the glory of the Most High and the unspeakable consolation of mankind: *Gloria in excelsis Deo, et in terra pax hominibus bonæ voluntatis!* What a venerable spot! The first upon earth touched and consecrated by the Son of God made Man and dwelling among us. The spot whereon He revealed Himself to the world in His sacred Humanity; where He received the adorations, first of His Blessed Mother and Foster-Father; then of the shepherds and Wise Men from the East; where, in His profound and mysterious humility *Scipsum exinanivit*, to teach us the vanities of the world. Oh, the sacred ground! the rich stable! the precious crib! Is it a wonder ever since to see so many illustrious saints on their knees, reverently kissing the stony floor once sanctified by the Divine Babe? I never regretted so much to be a poor sinner and not a saint, to visit it, *ut decet*, acceptably, profitably, for myself and others. Within a few months I shall have reached, *D. v.*, my 75th year—a long life, indeed; one of trials and of consolations of no common character, which have made upon my heart an impression I can never forget. Indeed, I often wonder how I could stand some of them and live. God's holy will has been my comfort, and on the whole, my sufferings did not equal my joys. But this unexpected one, of a visit to the Holy Land, so long desired, surpasses all other joys. Therefore, in all sincerity, the more keenly I feel my unworthiness, the more readily I repeat in my inmost soul: *Misericordias Domini in æternum cantabo!* But why speak of poor me, when I am almost lost in the wonders now permeating my whole being? It is to reveal to you, in simple truth and honesty, what a loss you suffer in not having a saint to represent you all here! Henceforth you will understand how important to your best interests it will ever be to pray for me; that, as long as I remain your representative, I may be able to plead your cause worthily and successfully.

Since my arrival in Bethlehem I have not been idle: again and again I have visited the precious Grotto, which has for me a charm perfectly inexpressible, increasing each time I return to it. In such an atmosphere of humility, my chief delight is to press the cold floor with my lips: *Adhæsit pavimento anima mea.* Where could we find another like it? The Holy Family sanctified it; over and over again, floods of penitential and loving tears have washed it for centuries.

Among the numberless consolations I enjoy here, there is one I must mention: it is written that all the words the Blessed Mother heard from the shepherds, she preserved them in her heart—*conferens in corde suo.* Why would she not do the same with us? She doubtless heard all my petitions for myself and beloved Family, numerous as they were, so earnest and so often repeated. She knows them all by heart, and cannot forget any such cravings from a burning heart. To make it doubly sure, let all whose interests I have so earnestly advocated come to the crib in spirit and in fervor, and renew personally their humble requests, and secure the grand and successful issue of all the causes I have so seriously introduced into the court of the Divine Infant. But what did I ask at this holy crib for myself and all I love most tenderly? Where the needs are so numerous and so urgent, one might feel embarrassed where to commence and when to finish. At such a school, however, of astonishing humility, and, as it were, of self-chosen annihilation, for the first time open to mankind by the Eternal Son of God, all hesitation disappears. Humility, humility, humility! is the first, the great, the all-absorbing lesson of the Divine new Teacher, of His Immaculate and incomparable Mother, and of His modest and devoted Foster-Father. Even now, after a period of 1887 years, the same heavenly doctrine is taught with the same eloquence by every inch of the pavement and vault of the rough excavation of the solitary rock. Yea, the very air of the precious Grotto breathes into every soul an aroma of humility, nowhere else to be found and enjoyed with equal delight. Hence, my first prayer for my dearest friends has been, and shall continue to be, that, like our Divine Master and Model, we may all prove meek and humble of heart: *Discite a Me, quia mitis sum et humilis corde.* Alas! What is virtue unless founded on this unshakable rock? Such a basis will bear firm and unmoved, against all storms and assaults, the strongest and highest edifice of perfection; any other will crumble into ruin at the first serious attack, as it did even among the angels and in the Garden of Eden. The great lesson of Bethlehem is the indispensable remedy against the malicious serpent's suggestion: *Eritis sicut dii.* Humility seldom, if ever, goes alone. Since our Blessed Lord came from heaven and rested in a manger as the humblest of the humble, humility has been acknowledged as the true mother of all virtues. In proportion as it reigns in a soul, perfection increases, until the following and best eulogium can be applied in truth, especially among Religious: what humility crowning such merits! But where should it be found, as a natural, a family inheritance, if not among the children of the Holy Cross?

Before coming to Bethlehem it was my happy privilege to spend four days in Jerusalem, and to offer there my first Mass, at the foot of the cross, on the very spot where our Divine Saviour expired; my second Mass was celebrated on the tomb from which he rose again, to die no more—two special favors I can never, never forget. I enjoyed both beyond expression, carrying, as I did, in my heart, to these most venerated spots, the beloved family I represent, and soliciting on each of its devoted members all the blessings of Heaven. But what did I ask, above all, on those two solemn occasions? Humility, purity, devotedness, obedience even unto death. When I went to the