

Holy Cross, Congregation of
Circular letters

UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME LIBRARY

C I R C U L A R

OF THE

REVEREND F. SUPERIOR,

OF NOTRE DAME DU LAC,

TO ALL THE

MEMBERS OF THE ASSOCIATION OF THE
HOLY CROSS

IN THE UNITED STATES.

No. 3.

8 Dec. 1852

Edward Sorin

LIBRARY
UNIV. OF
NOTRE DAME

Ms. Coll.

NOTRE DAME
COLLECTION

B X 3680.1
A 748
1852

179635 J M J

I. M. I.

FEAST OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION, 1852.

REV. FATHERS, AND DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS:

Deprived of the consolation of spending this blessed day with you, I shall yet find it a relief to my feelings to render my leisure available to those whose interests are dearer to me than anything on earth. "Although absent from you in the body," I may well say in the language of the Apostle, "I am always with you in spirit." Indeed, "you are continually present to my memory, and I trust in God I shall never cease to pray for you with joy." I never feel more sensibly than when separated from you, the tender affection which God has deposited in my heart for those He has entrusted to me, and especially those who from the beginning have persevered with me through our many tribulations. Above all would I shun being ungrateful, even to a child; scarcely then could it be conceived that I should remain indifferent in respect to a family whose characteristic feature, in all its members, has always been "devotedness." Although God alone was expected to reward the many virtues which are the inseparable companions of "devotedness," yet whatever has been done or suffered for His sake, at my feeble voice, has, in a manner, placed me under the same obligation, as if it were done or suffered for myself. From this you may perceive how much your unceasing exertions in our common and holy undertaking, have obligated me to each one of you.

This, however, is but preliminary to another consideration of

much greater importance, which forces itself upon my heart, on this day, with a peculiar strength. I have dwelt in thought on the past, and have understood that our indebtedness to Heaven is so great that nothing short of an unlimited gratitude can ever discharge it.

You already know how much I desire to see the blessings of Heaven, of which we are the daily objects, duly appreciated among us, and how much I fear lest the sources of divine graces should be dried up by our ungrateful insensibility. But listen to me once more on this subject, and you will see whether our history alone, however short in point of time, is not already filled with sufficient proofs of divine munificence, to bear me out when I say that, as a community, we owe an immeasurable debt to Heaven.

Only ten years have elapsed since Providence brought the first sons of S. C. to a wild and deserted spot in the cold north of Indiana. They were six in number, five poor religious brothers and a priest, all equally destitute of those human resources which insure success in this life. Ere they arrived at the place of their destination, the memorably long and severe winter of the year 1843 had set in, with an alarming rigor; and when they reached their journey's end, each one of the new pilgrims had paid, in one part or another of his body, his tribute to the inclemency of the country. An old and miserable log-cabin, well nigh open to every wind, was the only lodging they found at their disposal to rest themselves from their long fatigues. They dared not risk their lives in it, however, for the night, until after the labor of a whole day, they had rendered it less inhospitable and dangerous. The kind offices of two or three good sisters would have been then very acceptable; but it was in the designs of Divine Providence that the first founders of the work should be left for some time in destitution of every comfort, and be thus prepared to receive with more gratitude even the least favor from above; particularly the numerous benefits arising to each member of the family of S. C. from that truly admirable plan, that was soon to determine its mode of existence, and to bring weak isolated individuals under a successful simultaneous co-operation, under one and the same direction. Nevertheless, this first arrival on the spot now called by the blessed name of Notre Dame du Lac, however severe upon hu-

man delicacy, made on the new-comers an impression which time will never obliterate. Wearied though they were, and intensely cold as was the atmosphere, they would not retire before contemplating again and again, and from every point around the lakes, the new scenery now before them. A deep and unspotted covering of snow was then spread over land and water, and forcibly brought to their minds the Unspotted Virgin, who seemed already to have taken possession of these premises, and to claim the homage, not alone of the site itself, but also of every human soul that should ever breathe upon it. How readily and thankfully this auspicious thought was to be received by these poor missionaries, whose chief hope was in the protection of Mary, and whose paramount object was to procure, after God's glory, that of His divine Mother, will be easily understood. I shall tell you now what I have never said before. At that moment, one most memorable to me, a special consecration was made to the Blessed Mother of Jesus, not only of the land that was to be called by Her very name, but also of the institution that was to be founded there—an humble offering was presented to Her of its modest origin and its destiny, of its future trials and labors, its successes and its joys. With my five brothers and myself, I presented to the Blessed Virgin all these generous souls whom Heaven should be pleased to call around me on this spot, or who should come after me. From that moment I remember not a single instance of a serious doubt in my mind as to the final result of our exertions, unless by our unfaithfulness we should change the mercy from above into anger; and upon this consecration, which I thought accepted, I have rested ever since firm and unshaken, as one surrounded on all sides by the furious waves of a stormy sea, but who feels himself planted immovably upon the motionless rock. Numerous as have been the dangers of all sorts to which we have been exposed, the obstacles and difficulties we have had to meet and overcome, the sufferings and crosses we have had to undergo, the various assaults and the persevering efforts of hell to destroy the community in its infancy; though often annoyed by the ill-will of open foes without, and more than once betrayed by false friends within, I say it with a sentiment of deep gratitude, of every one of these trying occasions our Blessed Mother has invariably availed Herself to show us Her

tender and powerful assistance. Hence it becomes, as it were, a second nature for us to recur freely to the Blessed Virgin, and to tell her, with a child-like simplicity, our fears, our hopes, our sorrows, our joys, our wants and desires, our thanks and love.

Such is the atmosphere which it has been our happy lot to breathe. No sooner has any danger, threatening these otherwise helpless children of Mary, ever been discerned, than, lifting up their eyes to their heavenly Mother, they beheld her arms open to receive them, to re-assure and console them. Not unlike the mustard seed of the Gospel, our newly planted Community, if not as yet grown to the full size of a large tree, covering the earth with its shade, and affording repose to the birds of the air, yet begins to stretch forth its branches far and wide over the land, and bids fair for an extensive usefulness, provided, in the inscrutable designs of Him who searches the hearts, we may not prove too unworthy of the continuation of His blessings.

A new establishment at Cincinnati, which, it is confidently hoped, will prove a valuable resource to the Association, will close this eventful year. May our blessed Mother, in whose honor it also is humbly dedicated, make it one of the richest of the favors which have marked this year among us!

Within six or seven months the Institution has gained fully one-third in all its branches. Valuable improvements have been made at Notre Dame, where I am happy to say a new Noviciate has been created for the ecclesiastical novices in the island opposite the Noviciate of the brothers, which is to be re-occupied this very day by its first owners; and although the expenses of the Institution have of necessity been considerable, yet the amount of its old standing debts has been diminished by nearly one-half. Our three noviciates are better supplied than at any previous period; the College and the Academy are almost full; the spirit of both our religious and students is perceptibly better than ever before; and above all, peace and concord reign throughout our ranks. Much less than this should move me to a heartfelt gratitude to Heaven; for if Pagans themselves, when made recipients of temporal favors, were wont to say that their gods had given them those things, how much more sincerely should we acknowledge with grateful hearts the daily blessings thus bestowed upon

us? But whilst they were wise enough to say: "A god has given us all this," I would you were all prompted by a lively sense of justice, of humility, and of gratitude often to repeat in the depths of your hearts this other sentiment: "After God, we owe all this to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Praise be to the Mother of Jesus!"

If my last visit to Europe has opened new sources of grace upon our little family, it is again to the Blessed Virgin that I would chiefly refer the merit of it; for, together with the blessing of the Holy Father, in whose noble heart seems to be centered every pious sentiment towards the Mother of God, I have endeavored to recommend it most earnestly in many pilgrimages which I have had the consolation to perform to the venerable sanctuaries where Mary has chosen to manifest most unreservedly her power and love in behalf of mankind; I have not failed to secure for it the warm prayers of several communities and persons renowned for their extraordinary love of Mary; and finally, where have we met during our separation, but before the same throne of our beloved Mother? Is it not there we have sent forth every day our most fervent petitions for each other? I would cheerfully indulge longer in these considerations; but I must bring them to a close. Let us then recapitulate in a few lines.

For these ten years the Blessed Virgin has watched over our infancy with the most tender and motherly solicitude. Through Her efficacious protection, we have passed unhurt amidst dangers without number. To Her love we are indebted for all we have.— Now that our eyes can see, that our ears can hear, and that our hearts can feel in some measure what we owe Her, She comes with an unspeakable and irresistible maternal affection, She invites us to show Her some return of love, some marks of thankfulness.— Could there be one amongst us who profits by his growing reason only to slight and spurn the loving being whose every thought was for him long before he himself had any thought? Could there be possibly such a one in the midst of us? Oh! Blessed Mother, permit it not! Suffer not that we should ever be so blindly ungrateful. We can bear to be despised, to be persecuted, to be afflicted in every way; but rather than repay your infinite favors with base ingratitude, we would ten times prefer to die. Such

doubtless are the sentiments of every one of us. Permit me, then, my dearly beloved friends, to mark here how our gratitude might be exhibited, in a manner most likely to please our Blessed Mother. It is in Her name, and as a proof of your filial dispositions towards Her, that I beg you to consider well the following observations, and to read them over at every monthly retreat during the next year:

10. CHARITY.

Of all virtues which must adorn our little community, Charity, the "bond of perfection," is the one we should feel most singularly desirous to welcome in our ranks, and to maintain, even at the cost of all our personal views, or convictions, or ease. "Let each one," says St. Liguori, "bear with his brother in charity. We have each one our faults; he who has to put up with his brother's defects to-day, will have to be borne with himself to-morrow." Let no one pretend to correct others; I mean to speak of those who affect a tone of superiority and contempt. Correction is an act of charity, which many persons render injurious and of no avail whatever, through their want of charity. None should meddle with the office of another, unless duly requested. Above all, do not mock or ridicule the natural defects of any body; this suits only comedians; neither should you indulge in any bitter or offensive words. As to those who would feel inclined to spread reports, let them know that I look on those sowers of discord, with St. Liguori, as upon so many incarnate demons, who, I trust, will never be allowed to make a long stay with us. Oh, how much more acceptable, both before God and their fellow-beings, are not those delicate souls who never utter a word of blame, or of complaint, or of censure or anger! Well may they say at night: "I shall rest in peace," for they are in peace with God, with their neighbors, and with themselves. No frightful phantoms will disturb their refreshing repose. Well done, good and faithful servant, continue to-morrow again; the path you follow is safe, very little different from that of an angel. The watch you have set on your lips will soon be recompensed far above what it costs you. Esteem

and affection will surround you on all sides without; and within will be a peace of conscience which surpasses every other sentiment. Let it be, therefore, your great object not to grieve any one, though most unjustly provoked or injured. Be on your guard, and suffer not the peaceful aspect of your countenance to be changed into the frownings of anger or the indications of any other evil passion. Should you suffer still more, remember God sees you.

20. SILENCE.

The sooner to attain the happy state mentioned above, two things particularly should be observed, viz., habitual silence, and a proper recollection when speaking in recreation.

Silence, says St. Liguori, is "the rule of rules in a community;" and he adds immediately, "if we observe it well, we shall soon become saints." Any serious disregard of this important point would be followed by a general relaxation throughout our Association; and the responsibility of such neglect I would by no means myself assume. I therefore charge the consciences, not only of local Superiors or Superioresses, but also of all directors or directresses of offices, schools, or employments, with the strict observance of silence throughout the day. I would have them bear in mind that we shall account before God for even an idle word, and that by silence and by rest a devout soul profits much, penetrates into the secrets of the Scriptures; and there finds the source of those happy tears that wash and purify her at night. Let us speak little to men, and more to God. Without habitual recollection of mind there is no spirit of prayer, and those who go to meditation in this disposition go to torture. Every moment seems to be an age. They come distracted, they go distracted. They lead a miserable life, neither enjoying the world nor possessing God. A community life and a life of silence must mean the same with us.

30. RECREATIONS.

True religious will not enter too freely upon conversation in

recreation ; for these moments are given us not to dissipate, but to refresh our minds. There ought to be a difference between the rest of religious persons and of worldlings. It is right to take a little recreation ; but it is no less true that we ought, even during this time, to seek for God, and to recreate ourselves merely because God wishes it. The evening recreation, especially, should be devoted to spiritual discourse ; viz., relating what has been read during the day about the virtues of some of the saints, as is practiced with much edification among the Oratorians. Prepare yourselves for recreation : otherwise I fear you will neither give nor find interest therein. Be attentive, simple, natural, and gay ; polite without affectation, discreet and charitable, for fear of saying or doing anything to hurt or cause displeasure to any one whether present or absent. Speak not while another is speaking ; say nothing of yourself ; do not withdraw apart but make one conversation with the one who presides, unless he himself directs otherwise. From time to time lift up your soul to God.

40. HUMILITY.

None is ignorant how important it is that our little community should be wholly imbued with the spirit of humility. This virtue is necessary everywhere and at all times, if we wish to please God and to glorify Him. It is a foundation indispensable to merit and success, in the mission, in the class, in the field, in the house, and in all places. He who humbles himself shall be exalted, whilst the proud is held in horror before God. It is the virtue which especially Jesus would have us learn of Him. Perhaps it is even more necessary in our institution than in many others, from the fact of our community being composed of so many diverse materials—hardly to be brought into perfect unity, unless a thorough spirit of humility pervades all its branches. Only humility will prevent the Fathers from indulging sentiments of vanity and ambition to domineer over the other two branches. Only humility will prompt them to become models of every virtue to their inferior associates. But to confirm the members of the other branches in due respect and submission to those who stand elevated, by their ordination, far

above even the kings of the earth, I shall place before them here a sentiment of the most remarkable Saint of our modern times. St. Liguori heard that one seemed to wish to place himself on an equality with the Fathers, and that he adopted a familiar tone with them.-- He immediately wrote to the Superior of the House to which the individual belonged, saying: "Humble Brother N., and make him see his pride; tell him that if he does not amend and abase himself before the Fathers, he shall be expelled, like another Lucifer, from the House."

What a shame did he write on another occasion: "Lay-brothers aspiring to pre-eminence! do not give me any further trouble.— I love you, my brothers, but I wish to make you become Saints, and the first and most needful virtues for you, are humility, obedience, and patience. Without suffering there is no sanctity. I give my blessings to all the brothers whose intentions are upright; but not to those who have evil ones; for through their pride they do not deserve the benediction but the malediction of Jesus Christ. Your places will always be after the lowest of the Fathers and Novices." The language of this great Saint, reputed, however, to have been so meek and merciful, was still more severe when directed to the priests of his congregation. It made him ready to die when he saw a priest merely indifferent about anything that concerned the glory of God. He could not bear with pride in a priest. The very name of self-love was odious to him as a blasphemous cry. This accursed self-love, he used to say, causes daily the loss of multitudes of laymen, priests, and religious. It sends numbers into purgatory, and many into hell. If this accursed spirit comes into the Congregation, better were it that it should be destroyed. I beseech God to destroy it the moment self-love should be tolerated in it. It happened one day that one of the Fathers used the expression: "On my honor." This was worse than heresy in the eyes of the Saint. In his next conference he incessantly repeated "on my honor." Our honor, said he, is to be despised, vilified, and made like Jesus Christ, the opprobrium of men and the abject of the people.

Such is also the spirit of our Constitution, and of our saintly founder. Such must likewise be that of all his children, particularly at the beginning of the Association.

50. VOCATION AND PERSEVERANCE.

Vocation is the greatest blessing God could confer upon us, after the benefit of our creation and redemption. Not a day should be allowed to pass without our thanking God for it; and we should continually fear lest we should lose it. Hear again St. Liguori: Vocation and predestination are only one and the same thing. Woe to him that loses his vocation. The Lord chastises with rigor even in this life those who turn their back upon Him, without considering their vocation. They carry about with them a remorse which torments them until death. And what a death! I say it, and I will always repeat it, that many are now in hell from having lost their vocation. When a link in the chain of grace is broken, all is lost. The devil cannot tempt us more dangerously. Therefore we should pray every day, at mass, in our communions, to Jesus Christ and His Blessed Mother, for the grace of perseverance; for it is one quite distinct from that of vocation. God may give us the grace of vocation even in the midst of our sins, but that of perseverance is the fruit of prayer and meritorious works. None will be crowned unless he has persevered unto the end; and it is this crown that the devil wishes to take away from us, God allows him to tempt us, to try our constancy and to reward us proportionably. May He grant to us all to persevere and to die in His holy grace!

Allow me to recommend to you the reading of, and meditation upon your Rules, and especially those regarding your vows and offices. The day is fast approaching when the Supreme Judge will render to each one according to his deeds.

10. During the year 1853 all the members of the Association in this country, are to write monthly (on the day of retreat) to the Provincial, by way of direction. They must also make it their duty to inform him of whatever disorder they may have noticed in the course of the previous month—remembering that whoever could have prevented an evil by denouncing it in time to the superior, and yet did not so, is a traitor to the Community; this being no charity but iniquity. The object of this prescription is simply

to obtain a knowledge of the interior of each member and of the whole Institution, for the benefit of all.

20. All letters sent by or to any member of the Association, shall be first perused by the local Superior or Superioress of the House he belongs to. As death enters into the soul through the door of the senses, so the poison of worldly things enters Religious Houses through letters written from without. Still less let any one hold secret correspondence.

30. Our three Noviciates being now more than ever the foundation of our hopes, every member will offer for their success a Communion every month, viz., on the Monday following the spiritual retreat. No intercourse is permitted with those actually making their Noviciate.

40. I exhort all our associates to receive Holy Communion during the next year on every feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

50. The use of hair-cloth or of discipline among the members of the Association who desire it, is left to the discretion of their spiritual directors who should not permit it oftener than once a week.

This circular shall be read in every one of our Houses at the first spiritual reading that follows its reception.

May the blessing of I. M. I. remain upon us forever.

E. SORIN, Provincial.