

J. M. J.

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OF THE

VERY REVEREND SUPERIOR-GENERAL

TO THE

Congregation of the Holy Cross.

NOTRE DAME, Nov. 21, 1874.

REV. FATHERS AND DEAR BROTHERS IN JESUS CHRIST:

On this interesting Festival we, doubtless, have all endeavored to present ourselves to God, after the Blessed Child, with, as much as possible, the same pure intention, and the same sincere desire to serve Him, and serve Him alone. For each of us it has been a precious occasion to renew our vows and call upon us all the blessings we need to remain till death faithful to our solemn engagements. May our good God give us clearly to understand the sublimity of our vocation and impart to us strength to fulfil, not in part, but entirely, the duties it imposes on every soul thus singularly chosen.

In connection with this beautiful Feast and the renewal of vows with which it is accompanied in all Communities, let me call your attention particularly to one of the three engagements we have assumed, viz.: Holy Poverty.

The present hard times and the general anticipation of unusual sufferings through the approaching winter, make it almost a duty on my part to address you a few words on this important point. The tomb, which within scarcely more than two weeks has closed upon four of our dearest members, should have made us serious and attentive to the warning of Providence. With the dawning of a new ecclesiastical year, we should all, in earnest, renew our purposes of amendment, were they to bear only on the holy season comprised between the first of Advent and Easter.

The poor we shall always have with us, says Our Blessed Lord, that we may ever have an occasion of acquiring merits in feeding and clothing them. This is not intended for the rich only, but even for those already bound by the vow of poverty. Alas! who cares for the poor in this world of ease and comfort? Who feels for them? Generally not the wealthy, but the indigent and the destitute. This then is our privileged lot, to see and attend to the needs of the suffering members of Our Beloved Saviour. Their calls this winter will probably be frequent and numerous. Let the doors of our Houses, and still more the doors of our hearts, be ever open to their humble requests. Jesus hides Himself beneath their pallid countenances. Should we be even poorer ourselves than they, still let no poor be ever turned out from us hungry. Sympathy for the needy was a prominent feature in the character of all the Saints.

It seems to me that all of us, Religious of the Holy Cross, might easily share in this blessed

work, this very winter; and while relieving many a suffering person, we would enrich ourselves with merits which thieves can never steal nor moth ever destroy. To a good will, means abound. Is there one among us who from this on to Easter could not mortify unnecessary appetites and gratifications, or sensualities and prodigalities—nay, more, unwarranted and dangerous indulgences—and thereby save daily the value of a few cents and thus enable the House in which he resides to set aside every day a little assistance for the poor of Jesus Christ. Suppose we all enter on this spirit with a will, shall we have reason to fear sad results for the Congregation? No; no; but a special blessing upon each House might be surely looked for. Retrenchments are spoken of in all directions. Our best Religious, I am confident, will take the word to themselves; and although they are already known in the Community for models of retrenchment in all things unnecessary, they will be first in finding some new method of saving, and will give in this, as in the rest, an efficient impulse to all around. *Beatus qui intelligit super egenum et pauperem.* Oh! the beautiful words: Blessed is he that understandeth concerning the needy and the poor, the Lord will deliver him in the evil day. (Ps., xl, 2.)

It will not be amiss to consecrate the following meditation on this current expression of the day, "retrenchment" and give every one an opportunity of seriously examining what he can "retrench" from his usual course, without peril to life or health. It will not take half an hour to find out many an expense we could avoid, and many another expense, already incurred, that could be made last longer with proper care and attention. Devotedness and the want of it come under that same heading. Frequently one becomes a resource, a treasure, where another is a burden, if not a scandal. We must be contented to be treated as poor. Should we gain nothing else by this new general effort but to conform ourselves to the spirit of poverty, we might well congratulate one another: for the love of poverty is the greatest riches of a Community. In a military sense, the word "retrenchment" has another and even higher meaning, which applies admirably to Religious. With soldiers in sight of the enemy, the sense of self-defence prompts them to erect, were it only for a night, a "retrenchment," or an earthen wall, for protection, to shield the camp from the projectiles of

their adversaries. In like manner a soldier of the Holy Cross should never go to rest but under the safeguard of a retrenchment.

In answer to various inquiries as to who is obliged to fast on fasting days, I must state that whoever feels morally certain that his health shall not materially suffer from it, is obliged by the law of the Church. My impression, however, is that few, comparatively, are able to discharge their obediences with the fast especially when protracted, and therefore are dispensed. In doubt, one should consult Superiors. Again, one may be unable to fast in the strict sense of the word, and yet might abstain from full meals morning and evening.

But to be permanent and real, retrenchment must begin with the heads of our Establishments and in their general administration. In other words, every House must be responsible for itself; otherwise, a Provincial House would soon ruin itself, simply by multiplying its foundations. Let me illustrate the above declaration by an example:

For the twenty-seven years that I was Superior at Notre Dame this foundation never cost the Mother-House in France one penny. From the first to the last, we paid every *trousseau*, or the worth of every trunk for Priests, Brothers, or Sisters who came out from France; we paid every cent of our travelling expenses; we paid every tax imposed by General Chapters; and at the time of the memorable crisis that threatened the Congregation in 1855, we sent on as a gift \$3,000 in one day, and \$2,000 another day. Our accounts were balanced yearly, and very seldom was Notre Dame in debt to the Mother-House. It gave us all here a certain legitimate gratification, which I now wish to extend to all our Houses in arrears with their Provincial Houses. Therefore, I hereby prescribe that every Establishment of the Congregation, whether in Europe or on this Continent, take with their respective Provincial Secretary immediate steps, with a view to close up with him their own accounts, by cash or promissory notes, so as to relieve the Provincial Houses by the 1st of January, 1875, from all such foreign responsibilities; every House to be responsible for its own debt. Common sense dictates the measure. Every devoted member will see at a glance that it will make at once all the heads of the Congregation much more strictly interested in liquidating debts when resting exclusively on their own hands.

E. SORIN, C.S.C.,

Superior General.