

J. M. J.

CIRCULAR LETTER No. 72.

OF THE

VERY REVEREND SUPERIOR-GENERAL

TO THE

Congregation of the Holy Cross.

Sta. Brigida, Rome, March 1st., 1876.

REV. FATHERS AND BELOVED CHILDREN IN JESUS CHRIST:

I have just returned from a precious audience at the Vatican, where I had once more before leaving Rome the happiness of spending at the feet of His Holiness some of those delightful moments, always too brief, and yet ever making an epoch in a man's life; some of those moments one always loves to remember as a foretaste of the joys awaiting us in heaven.

If ever a man has been endowed with the gift of making others happy it must certainly be our immortal Pio Nono: this last audience alone would testify to it most irresistibly.

Whilst I write, I feel yet deeply moved by what I have seen and heard, and it is almost a relief to inform you of it immediately. Little as we are, I am convinced that His Holiness is expecting something from us; indeed I might say a great deal more than we ourselves imagine. The new Association of the "Guardian Angels of the Sanctuary" has been the occasion of this manifestation. A little further on you will see the expressions of the Holy Father. Whilst blessing it again this evening, the Pope places in our hands a powerful arm to defend the Church in the dearest portion of her flock. But He wishes us, as we may bring little children to him to pray with him, that we show ourselves most careful to prepare them well for this singular privilege. First of all he wishes that these dear little children be perfectly instructed, as far as age permits, in the knowledge of our Holy Faith. As a teaching body, here is our first duty clearly revealed: we must excel by a special care to place at the head of all sciences that of Religion; hence our chief end is to make of our pupils good Christians before they are learned scholars. The Holy Father is filled with this great thought, which in him seems to domineer everything else, as you may perceive presently. Hence when, contrarily to prescriptions, I asked Him if he would not write

on my graceful tableau of the Association a special blessing for the pious group represented in it, and those who would soon join them by His own side, "Certainly, certainly, my beloved son," said he; "let me see again that fine drawing of our Gregori;" and while saying this the Holy Father took his pen and wrote with a firm hand the following blessing, which will follow this in a few days to Notre Dame:

"BENEDICAT DEUS OMNES QUI AMBULANT IN SANCTA MANDATORUM SUORUM.

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If this Association the Holy Father has thus again blessed, after enriching it with a Brief and Indulgences, finds among you the welcome it deserves, as I feel confident it will, I will bless God for it with my whole heart; for in my estimation it is a rich mine from which we can draw priceless treasures.

Let us come now to the Holy Father's own words, which I give here with his permission, as directly addressed to ourselves: "My beloved son," said he to myself, "it is to the want of religious instruction we must ascribe this universal disturbance that shakes the foundations of Society; the only means to bring back order and peace upon the earth is to teach Catechism to the youth; it is to explain to little children the truths of our Holy Faith, that they may love them. To-day, children study everything, Religion excepted. It remains unknown; hence the flood of errors and evils which threatens to drown and destroy everything."

Qui habet aures audiendi audiat. May God help us to profit by this solemn declaration, personally uttered for the Religious Family of the Holy Cross. In the name of all its members I thanked His Holiness for it, and promised Him, on my knees, to bring His grave words before them all, and to make them, for myself, the basis of my administra-

tion. The Holy Father appeared not only pleased but gratified, by my promise, as far as I could read on that august and wonderful countenance.

Honor and glory to the teachers who will bear me out with a will, in this engagement; and especially to those who will impart, besides a real religious instruction, a true sense of piety in the young hearts entrusted to their care. To them I predict choice blessings. In proportion as they will have taken God's own interests to heart, Heaven's blessings shall follow them.

Let us place in honor the study of Religion; let us give it the time required; and above all, let us create and maintain in it efficient means of emulation. With a view to carry out the Holy Father's designs, I direct that on the Sunday which shall follow the reception of this Circular the head of each of our Houses assemble in Council all the teaching members of the Establishment, that they may examine before God what amendment may be made in their manner of imparting religious instruction. In the process verbal of the meeting, the Secretary shall set forth what is actually done; and in a second part, what appears feasible to obey the Supreme authority that has spoken; said process verbal shall be forwarded immediately to proper quarters.

Here it is we have reason to thank God for our religious vocation. Had we nothing more to teach than secular educators, as well might we have remained in the world. But what raises us above them is that our teaching leaves behind us all the aspirations of this world and fits our pupils for eternal life.

I start for Lourdes, thence I go to Lafaye, thence to Chaffes, and afterwards to a few other Establishments and to Paris, where I shall remain until May. May God bless us all and grant us to meet again. Oh! what a joy! Your devoted in Jesus Christ,

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