

CIRCULAR LETTER No. 88

OF THE

## VERY REVEREND SUPERIOR-GENERAL

TO THE

## Congregation of the Holy Cross.

FEAST OF THE PATRONAGE OF ST. JOSEPH, 1878.

REV. FATHERS AND DEAR CHILDREN IN CHRIST:

What a beautiful Festival! It is only since a few years St. Joseph was declared the Patron of the Universal Church; but in reality, from the very beginning, from the Stable in Bethlehem to our own times, he always was the protector of the Church. The Shepherds, and afterwards the Wise Men from the East, come in search of the Child and His Mother, and find both, according to the angelical announcement: but the Protector of both was also there, admirably fulfilling his Divine Mission for both the Child and His Mother, first of all, in what was to both more precious than life, *their common honor*; and next, for the necessities of life. There was the Church, with its natural and indispensable Protector, who sees to its every want. But the absolute need of such a Protector will soon appear more evident and palpable. How different the designs of God from the designs of men! What more Divine, more innocent and harmless—what more worthy of the universal welcome of the whole world, than that admirable Holy Family, that sacred nascent and saving Church! But in God's design, that heavenly Church was to meet, even from its cradle, with nothing but opposition and persecution from those it was intended to save. Who could have gazed on that sweet and Divine Babe and the countenance of His modest and celestial Mother, and conceive, for a moment, the least apprehension of any fearful design? And yet, scarcely had the Divine Infant been lying there a few days in a manger, when the king of the Jews, Herod himself, imagines there was a danger in that Child, and resolved to free his own mind from all fears by taking away His life. At once, soldiers are sent to Bethlehem, with one view and purpose, to kill the Child, even if a whole hecatomb has to be sacrificed to insure His slaughter. Already they are on the road; they will soon reach Bethlehem, and mercilessly carry out their impious and cruel orders. Poor little Babe! Dear, tender, sweet Mother! who will save you from the swords of that blind and fierce soldiery? How swift the feet of the tigers thirsting for blood! They are already nearing the doomed spot. O Heaven! again, who will protect the Child and His Mother! In the grotto, all are asleep; not a thought of the imminent danger. God Himself has been waiting to the last hour, the more clearly to manifest the needful protection of His illustrious Saint on His new-born and imperishable Church. At the last moment, an angel awakes the Protector and says to him: "Arise, and take the Child and His Mother, and fly into Egypt. For it will come to pass that Herod will seek the Child to destroy Him." The order admits no delay: the following instant Mary and Jesus, under the protection of Joseph, were on their journey, directing their steps, as Joseph himself leads, towards Egypt. Strange and unlooked for as the flight may appear, the young Mother, with her precious Burden in her arms, follows in silence her dear guide and protector: not a word of complaint or of apprehension escapes her lips; she trusts in him and fears no evil. Possibly, before they had gone any distance, they hear in the dead stillness of the night the screams and wailing of the poor desolate mothers whose children are cruelly snatched from their bosoms, to be killed under their eyes. Dear Mother! how can we thank enough the divinely instituted protector who saved us the persecuted Infant and His Holy Mother from a slaughter so visibly directed against the one who alone escaped from the deadly blow, because of the protection so timely extended? This paternal protection he will continue to both through their dreary, long and painful journey to Egypt; and for the seven years they will remain in exile he will devote all his thoughts and energies to support and to shield the two precious lives Heaven has entrusted to his care and protection. When he returns to Nazareth he will continue still to his last breath to work and spend himself for the same. Who will tell our happiness, knowing, as we do, that the same Protector who so admirably protected our Blessed Saviour and His Holy Mother, and in their sacred persons the Church itself, for some thirty years, still remains, and will forever remain, the same willing and loving Protector of the same Church, whenever and wherever his services will be accepted and his name invoked with confidence and grateful love!

But how much greater should our happiness be, when we reflect that we, Religious of the Holy Cross, have such a special claim to St. Joseph's particular protection, from the well-known fact that our Congregation originated exclusively *under the Patronage of St. Joseph*; and that if, in course of time, we added to this glorious dedication that of the Sacred Heart and that of Our Lady of the Seven Dolors, still never did we for a moment repudiate our first allegiance, nor allow our boundless confidence in his powerful protection to slack or weaken at any time! Why? If two such glorious and greater names were thus added, and formed for us a list of Protectors in Heaven, with a decided preference to the two recently given, what else shall we see in this mysterious fact but the doing of our first and only original Protector, who, in his unbounded humble love for us, has procured to our infant Congregation two greater and superior Protectors, rejoicing to be last where he was first, and giving us, as the best proof of his interest in our little family, his wonderful success in obtaining for us, in Heaven, two such Protectors, so much above himself? But where did he find them? In his own Family; and here again see the stratagem of his love and his humility!

Like the shepherds of old and the Kings from the East, you may come in search of Jesus and Mary and find both; but will you not see with them the glorious Protector, Master and head of the House? Oh! we know how things go in a well-regulated family. In the House of Nazareth there was a priceless Treasure. Where was the key? In whose hands did it rest? Like the great Treasures of the earth, there was a double key to it. You may imagine who held the two precious instruments. Sometimes the Gospel, naming only the Child and His Mother, may pass in silence the name of Joseph; but he is none the less present there, by Divine appointment, the representative of the Godhead, and as such receiving daily and hourly the homages and obedience of both the Child and His Mother. For thirty years the Holy Family is regulated in its every movement by the same head. Not only the Blessed Mother, to whom not a living creature could compare on earth or in heaven, obeys him, calling him, acknowledging him as her lord and master, but He Himself, the Creator of Heaven and earth, obeys him in humble submission. Both tell us, later on: "We have give you an example, that as we have done so you might do." Here are our models, our *authorized models*. What more shall we need to curb our vain pride and haughty self-conceits? Here is the Family after which Religious Communities must be formed; and in proportion, literally and precisely, as they resemble and reproduce it, they infallibly measure their own happiness, their usefulness and their glorious destinies. There every soul lives by Faith. Human comfort may be wanting, but an enjoyment that exceeds all earthly joys reigns supreme and undisturbed among their fortunate inmates.

If, by way of contrast, you turn your eyes from that lovely sight, and examine those poor nominal Religious, self-relying spirits, fault-finders, censurers of authority, always wiser than those over them, you will find little to edify, but much calculated to ruin the spirit of Nazareth; they deceive many in making themselves important if not indispensable. Mind what I say, and forget it not: Whoever has not the spirit of the Holy Family will benefit a Community only in one way, viz., by going out of it. Look not to the number, but to the quality. Twelve men sufficed, in God's own mind, to convert the world. The Apostolic College was far better after Judas had left it than before. May God free us—yes, such is my most earnest prayer,—may Heaven free us from all such as have not, and likely will never have, the spirit of the Holy Family.

The Encyclical of our new Holy Father has lately told the world, in magnificent language, the evils of our present time and the unprecedented sufferings of the Church. Hence, we must conclude that such a state of things cannot be met successfully by common virtue. To maintain their ground, Religious Institutions *absolutely require God's Blessings*. These blessings shall not be wanting to us if we are not wanting to them.

As far as I am concerned, I am not in the least disturbed by the consideration of the evils afflicting society at large. If God is with us, who can be against us? But the sudden disappearance of most of these afflictions, on one side, and an additional increase of prosperity on the other, would give us no security unless we show ourselves *Religious*, living up to our Rules, and drawing down new blessings continually on our ranks by a close imitation of the model Family, brought once more before our eyes by the glorious solemnity we this day celebrate.

I have been officiating here on the occasion, and must say that the day has been one of great edification and consolation to me. I am preparing to start with Mgr. Dufal, Mgr. Dubuis, and Mgr. Lamy, all desirous to visit Notre Dame.

To letters just received, I may say in reply that never did I enjoy a day more to my satisfaction, in praying undisturbed for my numerous friends beyond the sea. I am delighted to hear that Easter Sunday made so many souls happy. May our glorious Patron keep you all in the newness of life proper to this joyous Paschal time.

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