

J. M. J.

CIRCULAR LETTER No. 101

OF THE

VERY REVEREND SUPERIOR GENERAL

TO THE

Congregation of the Holy Cross.

NOTRE DAME, May 15, 1880.

REV. FATHERS AND BELOVED CHILDREN IN JESUS CHRIST:

How shall I express my joy on this happy return to our dear home; and above all, my heartfelt thanks for the prayers you have offered, with such consoling results! God alone knows how I longed for the same. Let us praise Him who has, once more, so kindly and so closely united us in His holy service!

At my age, I can but feel that I have only a short time to enjoy your company, and to edify myself with the cheering examples of your virtues. I return, I may say, not so much to live, as to end my days among those I love best on earth. For, to tell the truth, in proportion as I always feared to be made too much of in life, I dread the idea of being too soon forsaken after death. Indeed, the daily growing preoccupation of my mind, is not to be forgotten, but remembered and prayed for, when I can no longer help myself nor others; and I find an unspeakable consolation in the assurance that, once gone from the spot I have loved so long and so tenderly, many a devoted heart will breathe a fervent prayer as my cold remains, when prayer alone can relieve a poor suffering soul. Sweet as your welcoming congratulations are to my heart on my return in your midst, I enjoy them especially because they reveal to me a friendship I would vainly seek anywhere else; strong enough to outlive the unavoidable adieu; which should be the ruling thought of declining years, everywhere, but particularly among Religious.

Of this, the circular of the chapter, full and comprehensive as it is, could tell you nothing; and yet, while presenting it to your serious meditation, it was the first thing I wished to mention to our beloved Religious in these United States.

May we all, more than ever, find in each other's edifying examples an efficient means of sanctification to the last; and for ever, a cause to praise God for having gathered us here, from all parts of the globe, as in a sanctuary opening into Heaven! In the translation of the General House to Notre Dame none of us will fail to recognize a signal favor from our Holy Father; not a favor, however, to flatter our vanity, but one visibly calculated to impress on our hearts, a true and religious gratitude, calling forth our best efforts to acquire that perfection of which, before all others, we must henceforth give the example to the rest of the Congregation.

Here is a task, before which old age might well shrink from any hope of rest: but a soldier of the cross expects to rest only when under the sod.

Indeed, a very serious task stands before us to meet the views of Divine Providence. Notre Dame, being now the centre of the Congregation, must be the living embodiment of our rules in daily practice; everywhere in the Province, our Religious must live by their rules. To be perfected, the work has to be somewhat commenced over again. To bring it to a faultless state, we need no new combinations or devices: we have all we require to make it a complete success—our rules cover the whole ground. To see to their application and observance throughout, from the first to the last, will be my task. Who does not see that our destinies as a Religious Order entirely rest on it? Who could refuse his co-operation? Here is the secret of success for each and for all: *a good will*. Let us think less of ourselves, and more of God and of our neighbor.

Indeed, a serious task has to be performed: at a time when Religious are so fast filling this New World, we must try to compare favorably with each and all, especially in point of real commu-

nity life; in regular discipline; in obedience and devotedness to duty; in self-abnegation and poverty, in the full observance of our vows, and in a complete proof given every day to the world that we are true to our profession. Again, at a time, when all feel so deeply the loss we have sustained in the death of our lamented Father Champeau, it is no small task to prepare successors to those whom age and infirmities may unavoidably remove from active duty.

First of all, it ought to be clearly understood among us, that in everything we should be governed, not by private views or self-interest, but by *Principles*.

In a community, *Principles* alone will maintain order, and with it, the letter and the spirit of the Rules, against the continual encroachments of times, nationality, and personal inclinations. *They* alone will save it from the perpetual changes in which even the best will gradually grow weak and inefficient. Where there is no common centre confessedly acknowledged, to which all individual and vital forces naturally converge to form and uphold a power for good, very soon, private ambitions will emerge and rise up and make a breach here and another there in the protecting walls of the Rule and authority, to the great detriment of the general interests of the family; before long, this usurpation of power will be noticed and create disedification, discontent, and finally, loss of real esteem and pity. Once crept in, this ruinous disunion will insensibly widen its baneful effects and results, until peace and harmony shall have yielded to uneasiness and strife; and that, because *Principles* have been disregarded and sacrificed to vain and worldly spirits. May this never be the sad story of a single House in our Congregation! The Chapter in Paris, fully appreciating the unavoidable results of such irreligious tendencies, did not hesitate in recommending a certain number of expulsions rather than leaving a Community exposed to such poisonous influences. To guard against such a danger, any sensible Religious will feel more than ready to lay down his own will and to take to heart and cherish the sacred obligations of his vows, as the only guarantee a Community can enjoy for the blessing and happiness of its members. Does not experience everywhere prove that *holy obedience*, the indispensable basis of a Religious life, is the inexhaustible source of grace and peace, even when it seems hard to weak, narrow, vain and superficial brains?

From what we see, God has blessed this Province more abundantly than any other in the Congregation; hence our greater obligation to stand by *vital Principles*, by our vows, to preserve and perfect what Divine Providence has so liberally imparted. To assist our pious and devoted members, and to seek a continuation of the same heavenly favors in the most complete observance of our Rules, so earnestly recommended in our recent General Chapter, I direct that for three months our Constitutions, Rules and Directory replace all other books every day at meditation, examination of conscience, and spiritual reading.

Likewise, to facilitate the practice of obedience and alleviate the burden of authority, I advise to refer, as a rule, to regular councils, the examination of all favors asked of Superiors, before they are granted or refused.

May the holy grace of God enable us all to accomplish our duty religiously, fully, and with a will.

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