

J. M. J.

CIRCULAR LETTER No. 113

OF THE

VERY REV. SUPERIOR GENERAL

TO THE

Congregation of the Holy Cross.

NOTRE DAME, December 22, 1881.

REVEREND FATHERS AND BELOVED CHILDREN IN JESUS CHRIST:

Much as we may regret to see our boarding institutions wellnigh emptied for some weeks, at Christmas, we can scarcely condemn a habit, becoming yearly, more and more universal, when we look to the real and honest cause it springs from, viz.: the longing and irresistible want of loving parents to see their dear children at home and press them to their hearts, on the day *per excellence*, when childhood, from its Divine Author and Model on the bosom of His Holy Mother, became an object of love and adoration for all men. I understand such honorable impulses, such cravings of the heart on both parts; I respect them, provided they are not abused and turned into an undue loss of time and studies, and would much rather help to secure and extend than to reduce or alter them. St. Paul himself reckons among the signs of the worst times, children without affection, *sine affectione*. Indeed, daily experience confirms the apostolic declaration—what we look for in a child's breast, is not a stone but a tender heart. For my part, I could never see a new comer, really homesick, without feeling at once a special regard for the little interesting sufferer. The best recommendation a child can bring, is read in his tearful eyes, after parting with his dear mother. Upon such loving young hearts, the Fourth Commandment will be sweetly implanted; and with it every other duty will soon be welcome and enjoyable.

It seems to me that one of the greatest services we may render to society at large, is to return youths to their families, not only with improved minds, but above all, with hearts so visibly enlarged by temporary separation and a constant attention to cultivate, develop and perfect their first and best affections as to convince, *primâ facie*, their dear parents and home-circle, that they return to them more affectionate and more loving than they left them a few months before.

This is not simply sentimental; there is philosophy in this aim. In such a faithless age as ours, one of the surest and safest links to prevent a larger collapse of society is to bind, and to hold more and more strongly bound the child's heart to the parents' heart, to the family, to home, primeval and innocent affections. Any real educator of a comprehensive mind, must feel that there is no lever as powerful, to handle in our days, in order to bring a student to the prompt fulfilment of duty as to keep up prominent before his eyes, the joy or the pain to delight or grieve the heart of a dear father or mother at home, as the intelligence may reach them of his noble or mean behavior at school. But, as nascent little passions and difficulties arise, this lever must gain constantly likewise in weight and in efficiency, from an ever increasing sentiment of filial attachment in the child's breast towards loving parents at home.

Such is the first training a child must receive at school, the full observance of the Fourth Commandment. A young heart, shaped after this precept, growing daily in love for his dear parents, will be blessed, not alone with a long life, but with success through life, honor and glory to his own name and family, and often, with important services to his country. Hence again, let us make it a point, to keep our children's affections towards their beloved parents, every day more alive, as a most prolific source of happiness at home, a security for society at large, and a strong barrier against the contagion of seducing evil examples.

From the above, you may readily understand that the Fourth Commandment should not be entirely a *dead letter* even to Religious, although most of them may never see again their parents in this life; but forget them in their daily prayers, they never will, I am sure.

In your charity, I trust you will extend the fervor of your prayers, even to your spiritual parents. For myself, it would be a real joy, to meet you all at Christmas, and to spend with you the few days, which loving parents are so anxious to pass with their families. But such an enjoyment being out of the question, I give you all the best Rendezvous we can assign, viz: in the Holy Stable of Bethlehem, where, in spirit and in heart we may assemble and kneel around the Divine Child in the Manger, in company with Mary and Joseph; there to present Him the homage of our hearts, with the best wishes we can form and express for the happiness of each other. Oh! what a consolation, to be admitted, in that sacred recess, there to wish the Holy Family a happy New Year, and beg in return, for our dear Congregation, and especially for its oldest Branch, now so severely tried in France, all the blessings we need, to accomplish Heaven's designs upon each of us! Ah! let us pray with our whole hearts, that these holidays may bring down upon us all, the most abundant graces, and enable us to begin the New Year, perhaps the last one for some of us, with a renewed resolution to lead a life worthy of our noble name, the children of the Holy Cross.

As you see, I have succeeded this year in anticipating the promptings of your pious souls; I come first with my happy greetings: May God bless you all! Oh! what a delight, if I could express the same in person, to each and to all the dear absentees, especially to the veterans of our little army! Once more, let my heart breathe into the ear of each, its most ardent prayer:

Sweet Jesus, be a Saviour to all! Dear Holy Mother, fold them all to thy Heart! St. Joseph, be our Foster-Father to our last moment!

YOUR DEVOTED AND MOST AFFECTIONATE IN J. M. J.,

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