

J. M. J.

CIRCULAR LETTER NO. 120

OF THE

VERY REV. SUPERIOR GENERAL

OF THE

Congregation of the Holy Cross.

FEAST OF THE ESPOUSALS OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN,

NOTRE DAME, IND., February, 20, 1883.

REV. FATHERS AND BELOVED CHILDREN IN JESUS CHRIST:

On this beautiful Feast our glorious Patron presents himself to our veneration and love with such majesty that even the coldest hearts, if at all governed by the teachings of the Church, cannot remain indifferent, in presence of the unspeakable honor conferred on him by God Himself. Had there been a holier and more perfect woman on earth than Mary, she, and not Mary, would have been chosen and made the Mother of Jesus; and, likewise, if there had been a holier and more perfect man on earth than Joseph, he, and not Joseph, would have been selected to be the Spouse of Mary and the Foster-Father of Jesus, her Divine Son. Who could doubt it?

Our Congregation, having been at first dedicated to St. Joseph, and started in life (1822) under the patronage of this glorious Patriarch; having received, year after year, so many blessings through his intercession, no member of our little family should be surprised, but all, it seems, should feel pleased, and even delighted, to learn, at the approach of his month, that we intend, this year, to honor him through the 31 days of March, as we never did before; or, rather, to commence and continue a tribute of praises and thanks, as if we had never yet offered him any praises or thanks, for all he has done for us during sixty years. Sixty years! Nearly 22,000 days, every one of which marked by some special proof of his paternal, tender solicitude! We admit the fact; indeed we realize it; and yet, where are the evidences of our gratitude? We hate even the suspicion of ingratitude. Nothing is more humiliating before our fellow-beings. Can it be less odious, when it surges from insensible and stony hearts against Heaven? Alas! here is a wide field open to each of us for meditation,—a field covering years, possibly the best of our life. Oh, what a thought for a soul not yet absolutely lost to a due sense of honor! Receiving and receiving for so long, every day, every hour of the day, and making such poor returns! Before God, who seeth all, we plead guilty. Could we stand the same interrogatory more easily before our Blessed Mother? I can speak but for myself. Before her, above all, I confess I feel guilty of that very sin I hate most—ingratitude. But what makes my guilt worse, and without a shadow of attenuation or excuse, is, that it always was in my power to show my gratitude. Would to God I alone were forced to make such an acknowledgment!

But let us return to St. Joseph. Can we say that to him at least we have done justice? We should forever feel grateful to God for placing us at first under the protection of a Saint He Himself has honored above all the saints in heaven. To him He entrusted an office never committed to any other mortal, viz: that of protecting His Divine Son and the honor of His Blessed Mother, as also that of representing Him on earth, as holding for Jesus the place of His Father in heaven. When we consider the extraordinary mission of our glorious Patriarch upon earth, we readily confess that he must have been the "just man" by excellence, or the man who possessed all virtues in the plenitude of perfection. The Holy Scripture tells us that "God gives a holy wife to a holy husband, as a reward." Hence we may conclude that St. Joseph was the holiest of men, as he was chosen to be the Spouse of the holiest woman that ever lived.

The Feast of the Espousals reveals to us no human scheme, but a design wholly divine. God Himself, and He alone, had, in His eternal counsels, decreed and pre-arranged the mysterious union commemorated in this Feast; He Himself had fitted Mary and Joseph for each other *in grace*, as He had done for Adam and Eve *in nature*. To form an idea of St. Joseph's perfection we must contemplate the perfection of Mary herself. The difference is immense; but the resemblance is striking. Both were of the same royal family of David; the same blood ran through their veins, as the same sentiments of piety moved their hearts. Most probably St. Joseph had been sanctified in his mother's womb, thereby becoming an angel in the flesh, free from all concupiscence, free from all rebellion of the senses. Such elevation above all dangers from the flesh fitted him for his exceptional mission; for if our Blessed Lord would entrust His Virgin-Mother after His death but to a virginal disciple, *a fortiori* would He not entrust her through life but to a virginal Spouse.

[OVER:]

Who could imagine an union more pure, more holy and more sublime? In ordinary marriages the virtue of virginity was excluded; here virginity is the basis of the alliance. Had not the Blessed Virgin resolved to remain a virgin, she would never have become *the Mother* of God. Had not St. Joseph resolved the same, he would never have been the Spouse of Mary. Such was the espousal of Mary and Joseph, one not of *nature* but of *grace*, a heaven-inspired act, the union of *virginity* to *virginity*, than which nothing is more divine save the hypostatic union of the Word with our human nature in one person. Oh! how St. Joseph rises when we pause to consider his grandeurs and merits! How well entitled to our veneration and praises! And yet we do so little to acknowledge the honor of his protection. Had we proved ourselves truly grateful, blessings and blessings would have been poured upon us without number. Let us finally awaken to a sense of our obligations and interests, and try to convince him every day of his month that we are resolved to make up for past negligences, and daily to perfect all our sentiments of filial devotedness towards him.

As a test of his forgiveness and fatherly love, let us entreat him through his month to fill up our Novitiates with worthy candidates. Let our teachers place their pupils under his special protection. If all our schools are made pious, they will undoubtedly yield more and better vocations. Such will be the chief object of our petitions everywhere: new and good and solid vocations. May our prayers deserve to be heard and granted!

As members of a teaching Order, let us bear in mind a most important truth, viz.: that, by a series of miracles, Jesus prepared for Himself a virgin Mother and a virgin Guardian, that He might be cared for exclusively by virginal hands, move under virginal eyes, and rest on virginal hearts. Here is the secret of true Religious teachers' successes. Let our Novitiates be the engrossing thought of our family next month. St. Joseph must be entreated by every member to take charge of our Novices, to multiply their number, and, above all, to increase their virtues and qualifications.

Our Congregation was never so numerous as at present; and yet we have not one-half the number we need to meet the urgent applications continually made upon us. St. Joseph could double it in a short time. A few pious and fervent souls might prevail upon him to do so. Can we not find in our ranks ten, or even five, such souls? Let all who know the power of prayer entreat him, and give him no rest until he has filled up our Novitiates. Let him take charge of them, and re-establish in them the spirit of humble obedience and purity that reigned in his own House at Nazareth; that all our Novices may prove, later, true guardians of youth, as he himself was of the Divine Child. If all our Houses were blessed with the spirit of St. Joseph they would undoubtedly succeed. But, alas! some admit other spirits; hence the paralysis—forerunner of a wreck.

Let every Religious of the Holy Cross consider it a duty to read attentively, during the Month of St. Joseph, our Constitutions and Rules, from beginning to end.

E. SORIN, C. S. C.,

Superior General.

NOTE.—The most complete and most beautiful Life ever written of St. Joseph is probably the one composed by our own venerated and lamented Father Champeau, now re-edited in Paris, and magnificently illustrated in one vol., 4to., (price, \$5.00) by Victor Palmé, the chief editor in France. We should, by all means, have it published in English. The illustrated Life of St. Joseph has been accomplished under the direction of the famous artist, Eugene Mathieu. Twenty-one artists have contributed to adorn this masterpiece by Father Champeau. Dear Father Champeau! how could I ever forget him! In 1840 I was charged by our venerable Founder to receive him. We made our novitiate together; and, in 1880, Divine Providence called me to receive his last breath in Paris. *Requiescat in pace!*