

Very Rev. SUPERIOR GENERAL

Congregation of the Holy Cross.

BETHLEHEM, December 3, 1887.

REV. FATHERS AND BELOVED CHILDREN IN JESUS CHRIST:

Yes, it is from Bethlehem I write—the City of David, but more than all the House of the Living Bread! The city where peace between heaven and earth was first and solemnly proclaimed by the angelic choir whose celestial accents ever since re-echo all over the globe, to the glory of the Most High and the unspeakable consolation of mankind: *Gloria in excelsis Deo, et in terra pax hominibus bonæ voluntatis!* What a venerable spot! The first upon earth touched and consecrated by the Son of God made man and dwelling among us. The spot whereon revealed before the world in His sacred Humanity He received the adoration first of His Blessed Mother and Foster-Father; then, of the shepherds and Wise Men from the East; where in His profound and mysterious humility *sepisum exinanivit*, to teach us the vanities of the world. Oh, the sacred ground! the rich stable! the precious crib! Is it a wonder ever since to see so many illustrious saints on their knees, reverently kissing the stony floor once sanctified by the Divine Babe? I never regretted so much to be a poor sinner and not a saint, to visit it, *ut decet*, acceptably, profitably for myself and others. Within a few months I shall have reached, *D. v.*, my 75th year—a long life, indeed; one of trials and of consolations of no common character, which have made upon my heart an impression I can never forget. Indeed, I often wonder how I could stand some of them and live. God's holy will has been my comfort, and on the whole, my sufferings did not equal my joys. But this unexpected one, of a visit to the Holy Land, so long desired, surpasses all other joys. Therefore, in all sincerity, the more keenly I feel my unworthiness, the more readily I repeat in my inmost soul: *Misericordias Domini in æternum cantabo!* But why speak of poor me when I am almost lost in the wonders now permeating my whole being? It is to reveal to you, in simple truth and honesty, what a loss you suffer in not having a saint to represent you all here! Henceforth, you will understand how important to your best interests it will ever be to pray for me, that as long as I remain your representative I may be able to plead your cause worthily and successfully.

Since my arrival in Bethlehem I have not been idle: again and again I have visited the precious Grotto, which has for me a charm perfectly inexpressible, increasing each time I return to it. In such an atmosphere of humility, my chief delight is to press the cold floor with my lips: *Adhæsit pavimento anima mea.* Where could we find another like it? The Holy Family sanctified it; over and over again, floods of penitential and loving tears have washed it for centuries.

Among the numberless consolations I enjoy here, there is one I must mention: it is written that *all* the words the Blessed Mother heard from the shepherds she preserved them in her heart—*conferens in corde suo.* Why would she not do the same with us? She doubtless heard all my petitions for myself and beloved Family, numerous as it was, so earnest and so often repeated. She knows them all by heart, and cannot forget any such cravings from a burning heart. To make it doubly sure, let all whose interests I have so earnestly advocated come to the crib in spirit and in fervor, and renew personally their humble requests, and secure the grand and successful issue of all the causes I have so seriously introduced into the court of the Divine Infant. But what did I ask at this holy crib for myself and all I love most tenderly? Where the needs are so numerous and so urgent, one might feel embarrassed where to commence and when to finish. At such a school, however, of astonishing humility, and, as it were, of self-chosen annihilation for the first time open to mankind by the Son of the Eternal God, all hesitation disappears. Humility, humility, humility! is the first, the great, the all-absorbing lesson of the Divine New Teacher, of His Immaculate and incomparable Mother, and of His modest and devoted foster-father. Even now, after a period of 1887 years, the same heavenly doctrine is taught with the same eloquence by every inch of the pavement and vault of the rough excavation of the solitary rock. The very air of the precious Grotto breathes into every soul an aroma of humility nowhere else to be found and enjoyed with equal delight. Hence, my first prayer for my dearest friends has been, and shall continue to be, that, like our Divine Master and Model, we may all prove meek and humble of heart: *Discite a Me quia mitis sum et humilis corde.* Alas! What is virtue unless founded on this unshakable rock of stability? Such a basis will bear firm and unmoved against all storms and assaults the strongest and highest edifice of perfection; any other will crumble into ruin at the first serious attack, as it did even among the angels and in the Garden of Eden. The great lesson of Bethlehem is the indispensable remedy against the malicious serpent's suggestion: *Eritis sicut Dei.* Humility seldom, if ever, goes alone. Since our Blessed Lord came from heaven

and rested in a manger as the humblest of the humble, humility has been acknowledged as the true mother of all virtues. In proportion as it reigns in a soul, perfection increases, until the following and best eulogium can be applied in truth, especially among Religious: what a humility crowning such merits! But where should it be found, as a natural, a family inheritance, if not among the children of the Holy Cross?

Before coming to Bethlehem it was my happy privilege to spend four days in Jerusalem, and to offer there my first Mass at the foot of the cross, on the very spot where our Divine Saviour expired; my second Mass was celebrated on the tomb from which He rose again, to die no more—two special favors I can never, never forget. I enjoyed both beyond expression, carrying, as I did, in my heart to these most venerated spots the beloved family I represent, and soliciting on each of its devoted members, all the blessings of Heaven. But what did I ask above all on those two solemn occasions? Humility, purity, devotedness, obedience even unto death. When I went to the top of the Mount of Olives and kissed the sacred print of the foot of our Blessed Lord, just ascending to heaven, I renewed the same petition; and again in all the other venerable places blessed and sanctified by the presence and the loving deeds of our Saviour, as that of the Cenacle, of the Garden of Gethsemane, etc.

When we left Jerusalem, on Wednesday afternoon, for Bethlehem, accompanied as before by the celebrated author of the admirable "Guide of the Holy Land," we intended to return on the following day. But after visiting the Grotto of the Nativity, I could not make up my mind to part with it so soon. This sweet, delightful and sacred spot had a charm for me completely captivating. Next morning I said Mass at the Altar of the Crib, immediately after confession. What a happy event in my life! Next day I said it at the altar of the Angel's Apparition to St. Joseph. Then at the altar of the Holy Innocents; then at that of St. Jerome; then at SS. Paul and Eustochium; and once more at the first and best of all; thus enjoying myself in a little retreat as I never did in my life, praying for myself and my beloved associates to the best of my ability.

But at last we must leave this city of peace, of celestial enjoyments, for the city of unspeakable sorrows. Thus, joys here below pass like dreams. But we leave our hearts in sweet, innocent Bethlehem, the best place in the Holy Land—nearly three-fourths Catholic. We part with it in deep regret, better prepared, we trust, if not for a long life, at least for a better death. From it we carry with us thousands of pious mementoes, to be enriched in Jerusalem with precious indulgences, which we know will be duly appreciated by all the dear children of the Holy Cross and our best friends at home. One thing I sincerely regret: namely, our inability to visit Nazareth. But as it would require at least ten days to perform the journey, we found it impossible, and concluded to send there our dear Rev. Father Hély, who must have reached last evening the spot so dear to Christian hearts, and who will piously represent us all, where the Holy Family lived for nearly thirty years.

It is now so long since we had any news from home, that we can bear it no longer. We must be in Rome for Christmas, and at Notre Dame in January. Until that happy moment, let us all meet at the blessed crib of the Divine Infant, commending to His infinite tenderness all those we love, and learning of Him how to commence a new life to please Him, and secure more abundant blessings than ever upon our dear little Family. Now is our time; we have been introduced and presented to Him in His new palace. He remembers, He knows us well, with all our wants. He is more than willing, He is anxious to fill them all! What a marvellous opportunity to enrich ourselves at the crib of poverty! Happy Christmas! Happy New Year to all!

E. SORIN, C. S. C.,

Superior General.

P. S.—To perpetuate and propagate among our pious Religious of the Holy Cross the most beneficial and important results of a first visit to the Holy Land, I intend to employ my leisure hours at sea, while returning to Rome, to writing a little new Way of the Cross, as I have long wished to do, for the special benefit of our Congregation. Coming, as it were, from the very foot of the cross, immediately after the presentation and consecration of our dear Family to the sacred way of the cross, it may have and should have, indeed, for each one of us, an interest, a touching effect which other books on the same subject, even better written, might not have or possess. This will not be a tourist's new publication, but an affectionate Father's warm call to His beloved children to meet and meditate on Mount Calvary. E. S.

P. S. II.—The humble request of the Holy Father's Apostolic blessing, made by me on November 6, in favor of all the members of our Religious Family, of all our schools and institutions, of our novitiates and preparatory educational houses, of our missions and parishes, hospitals and orphan asylums, of our religious journals, editors and subscribers, and of all benefactors: The grant is as follows:

S. CONGREGAZIONE DI PROPAGANDA SEGRETERIA, N. 5277, OGGETTO.

ROMA, LI 5 DECEMBRE, 1887.

RMO. D. EDUARDO SORIN, *Sup.-Genli, Congregationis S. Crucis.*

RME. DOMINE:

Gratum mihi accidit his meis litteris P. T. significare SSmm D. N. Leonem PP. XIII, in Audientia diei 13 elapsi mensis Novembris, ex toto corde elargitum esse Apostolicam Benedictionem, de qua sermo erat in epistola a te data Antistiti Tyrensi, hujus S. C. Secretario, die 6 predicti mensis Novembris. Capta vero hac occasione, gratulor Tibi ex animo de florentissimo statu Congregationis S. Crucis, quem ex præfata tua epistola didici, ac spero fore ut Apostolica Benedictio maioris incrementi eidem Congni sit pignus.

Interim Deum precor ut te diutissime sospitet. P. T.

Addictus

JOANNES CARD. SIMEONI, *Praefectus.*

D. ARCHIEP. TYREN, *Sec.*

E. SORIN.