

J. M. J.

CIRCULAR LETTER No. 96

OF THE

Very Rev. Superior-General

TO THE

Congregation of the Holy Cross.

NOTRE DAME, May 1st, 1879.

REV. FATHERS AND BELOVED CHILDREN IN JESUS CHRIST:

On this auspicious day we begin again a great work; one of reconstruction or re-edification, of great magnitude for the interests of religion and of the Congregation. Never perhaps have we been called upon to pray for a more important object. By all means we must bring upon these new foundations the richest blessings of Heaven, that the grand edifice we contemplate erecting may remain for ages to come a monument to Catholicism, and a stronghold which no destructive element can ever shake on its basis or bring down again from its majestic stand. But to make sure of this heavenly protection, and above all, of our glorious Queen's maternal solicitude, one thing is necessary: we must lay down deep in our hearts the foundation of a new spiritual structure; or in other words, humble ourselves profoundly before God, for "He gives His grace only to the humble." The magnitude of our undertaking, without anything like adequate means, forces upon us a plain acknowledgment of our complete dependence on God's mercy, without which it would simply be folly to look for any ultimate success.

But there is another reason why we should enter humbly upon this new departure, and I commend it to the most serious consideration of every member of our Family, whether at home or on mission. It is undoubtedly very consoling for all of us to know that no blame attaches to any Religious of the Community, before the public, in our terrible calamity. Who could live under the stigma of being guilty of such a loss? But if the greatest saints were so ready to confess themselves, in tears, as the causes that provoked God's anger and chastisements, can we say that in His infinite Justice the Supreme and All-seeing Judge has not discovered in any heart among us some serious cause of displeasure or offence, calling for severe punishment on the rest of the Family? Who could plead innocent at such a bar? For my own part, I tremble, much more indeed for myself than for any one else. Good God! what a terrible thought! If "man knoweth not whether he be worthy of love or hatred" (Eccles., ix, 1), have we not all reason to fear that instead of bringing blessings upon the Community, we may have, by some infidelity, or neglect, or direct offence, changed God's loving designs into anger, and caused this destruction? Who can take it, at first sight, for anything else but a punishment? This is a serious matter, and well worth meditating upon. We all hope it will prove a salutary punishment of something that has displeased God; but a punishment is meant; to see anything else in our catastrophe could hardly be sustained by any process of reasoning. We may, however, turn it into a blessing, and we love to admit it as almost a certainty; but, to be logical, we rest all our hopes on the fixed determination to remove at once from God's sight whatever may have provoked Him to anger, and to walk in a newness of life, with a firm purpose henceforth to aim at perfection, not in a general, routine way, but *with a will*.

Immense as it is, our loss may soon be called a real blessing, if it brings every Religious of the Holy Cross to the stout resolve to be, now and forever, a model of regularity and devotedness, of obedience and humility; a cheerful lover of actual poverty—one, in a word, of whom the Community may well be proud, one we may rely upon with complete confidence and security. The Introit at Mass, this morning, shot me, as it were, through the heart, so admirably and consolingly did it seem to be written for us: "from the depth of their affliction they cried out to the Lord, and the Lord heard and granted their prayer; alleluia." In our distress, we bless the Lord; for He chastises us, as a loving Father, for our own good, and greater good. Every day, since a week, brings fresh testimonies that He wants us to be made wiser by the warning, to bless us more abundantly than ever. Were it not for this profound conviction, which nothing can shake, this heavy and shocking blow would have already laid me in my grave. God alone knows how terribly it has affected me, to see with my own eyes, in my old age, enfeebled by sickness, the fruit of so many years' labor in ashes and ruins. If I live yet, in sight of these vast smouldering debris, I owe it to our good God's special grace, and to the prayers of so many fervent souls, whose touching sympathies I can never sufficiently acknowledge. But, strange to say, I live in full faith to see better days than I have ever seen. Never did I anticipate such glorious destinies for the children of the Holy Cross as I now do, from these immense smoking ruins, in which all human hopes are buried, with the pride we took so recently in our prosperous efforts. This great and sudden trial has obtained its intended result. From this vast tomb, I see the Congregation rising up to a new life of faith and piety, of zeal and charity, resting on a foundation strong enough to bear up our highest hopes, viz.: a perfect union of hearts and minds, which is everywhere considered a *power*, a guarantee of success and victory. A common danger binds hearts together, while it multiplies friends and intensifies even the best sentiments. Never in our life did we see among ourselves, and our well-wishers outside, such cordial feelings centering on the same object.

Separation will not dissolve this happy union, but perfect it. Our Religious, this year, cannot think of coming home for vacation; alas! there is no room. But every one will have then an opportunity of collecting something to help in the great work of reconstruction.

The above Circular to be read, and resolutions renewed, at the Monthly Retreat for one year.

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