

Circular Letters

of

St. Gaspar del Bufalo

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Introduction

This small volume¹ gathers together, as the frontispiece declares, the Method and the Circular Letters relative to the Retreats made by the Missionaries of the most Precious Blood. St. Gaspar, from 1826 to 1837 (with the exception of 1828), sent these letters each year to his Missionaries on the occasion of the Retreat that was called for by their Rule. Eleven times, therefore, did St. Gaspar join his confreres for a particular time in their spiritual growth and offered them suggestions for their personal self examination as a testing and renewal of their missionary vocation.

In fact, in these letters, St. Gaspar delineates in its varied aspects the vocation of a missionary of the most Precious Blood. He comes back several times to the question which we have highlighted on the cover of this edition: "Who is the missionary?" The various letters do nothing else than give shape to the vocation of the Missionary; the necessity of leading an interior life so that the Missionary himself is truly an incarnation of what he preaches to others, the spirituality of the Blood of Christ, community life, the apostolic life animated by a vivid zeal etc. In short, what results is an "*identikit*" of the Missionary of the most Precious Blood, not only in how it relates to priests, but also to seminarians whom St. Gaspar called "*convittori*" [literally, boarders] and for the coadjutor Brothers who, at that time, were called "*Fratelli inservienti*" or simply "*Inservienti*" [Brothers-in-service].

With this given purpose for the Letters, namely, of being a mirror of the Missionary of the most Precious Blood, they are likewise the *magna charta* of the specific spirit of the Institute not only for St Gaspar's time but also for after his death. Significant is the testimony of Fr. John Merlini in the ordinary process held in Albano for the beatification and canonization of St. Gaspar: "In speaking of the final circular letter for our Retreat according to the Rule which he sent out in November of 1837, he said: 'This is the last one that I will be sending out'. Then, shortly after that he added: 'Let's begin with the first one that was sent at the beginning'. At this point, I shall say that, before having pointed out this particular fact to Fr. Biagio Valentini, he had already ordered me to send out that first circular letter, which I then did in 1839. Then I mentioned to him that that was exactly what the Servant of God had said to me". The same thing

¹ *Chi è il Missionario? Lettere per gli Esercizi Spirituali* = Who is a Missionary? Letters for the Spiritual Exercises; printed by Edizioni, Pia Unione Preziosissimo Sangue, Roma, 1985

was done with the succeeding letters.

In 1892, the Directory General of the Congregation felt the need of publishing in a small volume of 56 pages the *"Metodo per I Santi Spirituali Esercizi di Regola e Circolari di eccitamento del Venerabile Gaspare Del Bufalo ai Missionari della Congregazione del Preziosissimo Sangue dal medesimo istituita"*. That booklet has played a very important part in our Congregation in preserving the spirit of St. Gaspar. As far as the Italian Province is concerned in particular, I remember that up until just a few years ago, the Provincial Director in his annual circular letter concerning the Retreat for that year, would indicate the pertinent Circular Letter of St. Gaspar that was to be read.

In rediscovering the spirit of our Founder, encouraged by the II Vatican Council, the Circular Letters of St. Gaspar as well as his other writings took on a greater importance. The remaining copies of that 1892 edition on deposit in our Provincial headquarters had "expired". Hence another edition had necessarily to be prepared.

The occasion for this second edition came up with the arrival of the bicentennial of St. Gaspar's birth (1786-1986). As part of the general program for the celebration, the General Curia assumed the task of preparing translations of the Circular Letters in the different languages used in our Congregation. The Italian Province, on its part, in 1985 scheduled retreats for all of its members who were to make use of the Circular Letters. So, in order that each member would be equipped with the material, the decision was made to put out a new publication of the letters.

With our modern sensitivity to historical documents, *uti iacet*², we were not content simply to make a reprint of the 1892 edition. We thrashed through volumes in the General Archives of our Congregation in search of material dealing with the Method and the Circular Letters produced by St. Gaspar in his time. We were quite lucky in our search. Among some letters, we found one in the Saint's own handwriting (the letter of 1833) others were signed either by the secretary general, Fr. Giovanni Merlini, or by the pro-secretary general, Fr. Camillo Rossi. The copy of the Method for Retreats is also by Fr. Rossi.

The texts that are reproduced here are faithful to the originals; this is something that is not totally respected in the 1892 edition.

One can run into a particular difficulty, at least in the beginning, in reading the material on the Method and especially in the originals of the letters. That may be due either in the use of punctuation, in the use of capital letters quite different from our usage, or by being confronted with word usage, grammatical structures that are no longer in vogue today. Our fidelity to the originals has helped us overcome every temptation of tampering with them. Editorial changes involve only the substitution of titles and sub-titles (really quite limited in number) inserted throughout the letters in order to identify the contents. The Latin texts have been retained as they occur in the originals even though, at times, they are not always accurately quoted from the

² As they were found.

Vulgate. A translation of the Latin is found in a footnote. ... ³ The work of locating the Latin texts, finding the translations, as well as selecting the titles and subdivisions was shared by my confreres Fr. Romano Altobelli and Fr. Luciano Bugnola, to whom I extend my deepest gratitude.

Now that the Method and the Circular Letters of St Gaspar are made available for our daily usage, we must now intelligently and lovingly meditate on them, for in our use of them we will be stimulated to reproduce in ourselves more faithfully, with the help of the Holy Spirit and the intercession of the Virgin Mary, the image of the Missionary of the most Precious Blood according to the heart of St. Gaspar.

Rome, May 24, 1985

Mary Help of Christians

Fr. Beniamino Conti, C.P.P.S.
Provincial Director

First Part

Method for the Spiritual Exercises

METHOD

for the Retreats prescribed by the Rule for our communities

The apostle of the Indies, St. Francis Xavier, our special advocate, in a letter that he wrote to Fr. Gaspare Barzeo, a letter found among others of his inspirational documents, wanted to impress upon his mind in a special way the idea of not omitting *the practice of making a spiritual retreat every year*. Therefore, it is most proper that we, my venerable brethren, should place ourselves often before the face of God in order to check the books of our consciences and to prepare ourselves to make that particular report which God will require of us in proportion to the gifts that he has deigned to grant us. *Cui plus datum est, plus requiretur ab eo.*⁴ If the apostle St. Paul was fearful that after preaching to others he might become more reprehensible than all of

³ For these biblical references, [*in the Italian version*] ordinarily the translation is the version of the Bible put out by the Italian Episcopal Conference.

⁴ And still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more. Lk 12:48

them, what ought we to say, if the Apostle felt that way? Keep well in mind that since we are to communicate a spirit of fervor to others, it is necessary that we be well supplied and filled in a special way ourselves. Therefore, let us willingly retire to a place of solitude; let us listen to the voice of God as he directs us in a special way during these days. *Sonet vox fua in auribus meis.*⁵ Let this be an enlightenment of our minds and a sanctification of our hearts so that we may become indefatigable workers in the eyes of God.

Schedule for the morning

After awakening, we are to consecrate the beginning of the day to God: *Deus meus ad te de luce vigilo.*⁶ Time is to be given to holy meditation which will be conducted by the one chosen to proclaim the divine word on these holy days. A generous amount of time is to be allowed for private prayer and for the individual practice of the virtue of humility. It is written that the wisdom of God is given to those who humble themselves and become childlike in his presence: *Sapientiam praestans parvulis.*⁷ The meditation is to be attended by the entire community, using the themes found in the Method of St. Ignatius. They are to be adapted to our own communities and individuals who are listening to the divine word. The meditation will be concluded around the usual hour when the first Mass is begun. During that Mass, one of the Missionaries, in turn, will lead the recitation of the Chaplet to which the entire community will respond, being recollected in their places and imploring the spirit of compunction for sin and a tender devotion toward the mysteries of the most Precious Blood of Jesus. When the first Mass is concluded, the others will follow. After breakfast, time is to be devoted to the topic of Renewal and this will be held in the area where the boarding students and priests are located-but for the Missionaries alone. The boarding students and priests will gather in their own private chapel or in another room that is selected. If ever a second chapel is not available, which really will not be often the case, the seven Penitential Psalms will be recited. After the Litanies and the accompanying prayers, the holy Rosary (that is, a third of it) will follow. After the period of attention to Renewal, a short period of time will be set aside for individual reflection in one's room about the things that were heard. The boarding priests and students will apply themselves likewise to spiritual matters, in general, contemplating the special illumination that God gives during the solitude of a Retreat. After that, the little Hours are prayed in common in our private chapel where the boarding students and the priests will also take part in the chanting of that psalmody, even though some of them are accustomed to reciting the office of the Blessed

⁵ For your voice is sweet. Song 2:14

⁶ O God, you are my God, for you I long. Ps 63:2

⁷ Giving wisdom to the simple. Ps 19:8

Mother. One hour before the noon meal, the Missionaries will be questioned about their knowledge of the ceremonies for Holy Mass. The rubrics for the Mass, the Office and the Ritual are studied on Fridays throughout the year. At that same time, the boarding priests and students will make the Way of the Cross. If it necessary to use the chapel for making the Way of the Cross, the questioning of the Missionaries about the ceremonies of the Mass can be done in the library without difficulty in making that change. One half hour before the noon meal, the time is set aside for adoration of the most Blessed Sacrament, each one taking his place. At a quarter before the hour, a signal is given for the examination of conscience. During the period of adoration of the most Blessed Sacrament, each one privately recites the Seven Offerings to the Divine Blood, with the particular unction of spirit that one can arouse in the interior affections of his soul. During the noon and evening meals, there is the reading of the life of St. Francis Xavier or the letters written by that saint. In the noon reading, one is never to omit the reading of the Scriptures and the Martyrology. In the recreation periods, one should speak only of topics that are pertinent to the time of Retreat so that everything contributes toward the strengthening of one's fervor in the pursuit of the greater glory of God.

Schedule for after the noon meal

After the siesta and at the sounding of the usual community bell, within a quarter of an hour, one is to go for the recitation of Vespers and Compline, keeping in mind what is directed for the recitation of The Little Hours. After Compline, time will be allowed for a bit of a walk inside, but without breaking the silence except that one could in a soft voice confer with one's spiritual director or with the assigned spiritual director. While taking that walk, one might also read some spiritual book, but always without breaking the silence.

At the twenty-third hour, there will be the period of Renewal for the priest-boarders only. This will take place where the boarding students reside and at that same time the Missionaries, using another location, will recite the seven Penitential Psalms and one third of the Rosary, as referred to previously for the boarding students. In those places where there is no arrangement for boarding students, the second session of the Renewal for the Missionaries will take place. They are then at liberty for the recitation of the Penitential Psalms, for privately making the Way of the Cross in chapel, for reciting the Rosary etc.. Likewise, they are free with regard to offering mental prayer, conferring with their spiritual director etc. at a time throughout the entire day when they can choose to perform those acts usually done in common.

Finally, a meditation in common called for by the Rule will take place, using at that time the book of meditations for the month of June, dedicated to adoration of the Divine Blood. The schedule is then arranged so that before the time for the evening meal, Matins and Lauds for the following day will have been said. At the conclusion of evening prayers, the requests for a happy death are recited.

Schedule for the Brothers-in-service

In the morning, they will be present for the meditation and the Mass of the Chaplet. During the course of the morning, they should be especially careful to observe silence, and, while taking care of their duties, they should meditate on the mysteries, particularly of the Passion and Death of Jesus. It will be the Superior's task to arrange their assignments in such a way that in the course of the Retreat they will have the time necessary to confer with their own spiritual director. Effort likewise is to be made, insofar as possible, that there be no reason for leaving the house, at least not frequently.

In the afternoon, at the time when the Missionaries are reciting Vespers and Compline, the Brothers-in-Service are to make the Way of the Cross before the church is opened. Immediately after the way of the Cross, their period of Renewal will follow. Finally, at the twenty-third hour, in a place removed from the chapel where the Retreat is being conducted, they are to recite the Rosary which can be led by one of the Brothers-in-service. However, where there are boarding students, they should wait until the Missionaries have completed the recitation of the Penitential Psalms so that then they can join in the recitation of the Rosary. In the evening, they are to be ready to take part in the customary prayers in common.

Remarks

The Novena of St. Francis Xavier can be conducted at a time that is considered most convenient for the people. It should permit only an accidental variation in the usual schedule.

The Retreat, called for by the Rule, can be conducted either by one Missionary alone or can be shared by two. If the Retreat master is not selected by the Director of the Institute or by someone to whom that faculty has been granted by him, then, in a congressus of the community the person who is to perform that service is designated. Furthermore, eight days before the Retreat, a congressus is to be held by the Missionaries to establish the schedule, to assure the reading of this Method and its scheduling in the refectory on the day preceding the beginning of the Retreat and, if a circular letter is sent in preparation for the Retreat, that likewise is to be read in the refectory.

On the night of the beginning day of the Retreat, the singing of the *Veni Creator* will take place. It will be sung again each morning before the period of meditation that is conducted vocally. At the end of the meditation, a brief colloquy is had. Before the period of Renewal, the *Veni Sancte Spiritus, reple tuorum* etc. is not sung but recited: followed by the prayer, one Hail Mary with the invocation Seat of Wisdom and at the end of the period of Renewal, one Our Father and Hail Mary to St. Xavier and the ejaculatory prayer Eternal Father etc. One must always remember how frequently Xavier invoked the help of the Divine Holy Spirit.

TOPICS

to be treated in the Renewal of the Missionaries

1. The duties of a Missionary in regard to his own sanctification and the means of attaining it, cognizant of the exact observance of the Rules and being Led by the hand, so to speak, to the acquisition of the great spirit of God.
2. The duties of a Missionary in regard to his fellow-companions and to the Brothers-in-service, and, how reciprocal edification is to be promoted in community life.
3. The duties of a Missionary, whether they relate to pious organizations that our Mission Houses promote, or pertain to private or public Retreats or sacred Missions. Adhering to this method, we are referring opportunely to the Mass, to the ministry of hearing confessions, to the manner of proclaiming the divine word, to the mortification of ourselves, to our love for suffering, our spirit of prayer, of humility, of obedience without which the holy ministry entrusted to us by God can never be properly regulated. Each one of us must recall that *vir obediens loquetur victorias*.⁸

TOPICS

to be treated for the Priest-boarders

1. Duties of a boarding student in examining the signs of his vocation and the means for cultivating it.
2. Duties of a boarding student in his relationship to the community in which he is living and how the Rule is the means by which he is to develop it.
3. Duties of a boarding student in preparing himself for the external ministry and for a holy goal. These are to be set before his eyes from the very beginnings of his career.

TOPICS

to be treated for the Brothers-in-service

1. Duties of a Brother-in-service with regard to an interior, spiritual purity and a practical way of preparing himself for the reception of the holy sacraments with proper dispositions which will form a new epoch in our life.
2. Duties of a Brother-in-service in his relationship to the companions and to the

⁸ But he who listens will finally have his say. Prv 21:28

community in whose behalf he will cooperate by the exact fulfilment of his own tasks.

3. The method of training the Brother-in-service in the practice of living a life of the spirit in the execution of his assigned tasks, in particular by not ignoring the rules for mental prayer and the continual recollection of living in the presence of God.

We close this Directory with this salutary observation: God leads our souls to this holy withdrawal to indicate to us what his will is in our regard, in that of the sanctification of others, and in the ways that lead to the achievement of these ends; the merits that await us with the accomplishment of each good work; the intimate union with him that is possible here on earth; and, the possession of eternal joy in Heaven: *Justum deduxit Dominus per vias rectas, et ostendit illi Regnum Dei.*⁹ To this end, we are supported by the knowledge given to the Saints: *Dedit illi scientiam Sanctorum;*¹⁰ through it, we are taught to work hard so as not to have reason for being confounded on the day of the final Divine Tribunal: *Honestavit illum in laboribus;*¹¹ and finally: *Complevit labores illius,* handing down to others the mystical inheritance of values of an Apostolic Man and in behalf of those whom God continues to raise up in the ministry for his Church. The sovereign designs of his Divine Providence are fulfilled as we repeat: *Complevit labores illius.*¹² Amen. Amen.

Praise and thanksgiving be evermore to Jesus
Who with his blood has saved us.

Camillo Rossi, Pro-secretary General

⁹ The just man fled from his brother's anger guided him in direct ways, showed him the kingdom of God.
Wis 10:10

¹⁰ And gave him knowledge of holy things. Wis 10:10

¹¹ She prospered him in his labors. Wis 10:10

¹² And made abundant the fruits of his work. Wis 10:10

Second Part

Circular Letters for the Spiritual Exercises

First Letter - 1826

1. The true Spirit in the Work of God (the Institute)

1826

Praise to the Most Precious Blood of Jesus Christ.

Circular Letter on the occasion of the Spiritual Exercises of 1826

To The MISSIONARIES

Twelve years have now elapsed since our Institute, as envisioned from the beginning, has experienced growth in the Church of Jesus Christ. You can readily see how well it is suited to the renewal of proper conduct and the spirit of the apostles in the secular clergy of our time. In

this letter of encouragement I do not intend to consider particulars. I wish only to arouse in you and myself, my dearly beloved brothers, that true spirit which we must absolutely seek to attain in order to do the Work of the Lord. It cannot be denied that up to now, because of the pressing matters dealing with our new foundations, we have been called upon to take care of a variety of things, that is to say, various objectives pertinent to the sacred ministry which we exercise. But, like a painting that is first sketched, then actualized and finally perfected and ennobled, so also has it been with our Society which presently is enjoying the good fortune of being perfected and ennobled for the greater glory of God alone we serve.

I. Mystical Stones

To my mind, our missionaries represent so many mystic stones fashioned for the work to be done, reminiscent of the words of St. Paul: *superaedificati super fundamentum Apostolorum, et prophetarum, ipso summo angulari lapide Christo Jesu*.¹³ These stones must be polished by the stroke of the mystic chisel to effect that perfection which is required of us: *Scalpri salubris ictibus*.¹⁴ This should be in the course of this retreat which ought to remain memorable for all of us in order that we might erect that mystical building leading to eternal blessings.

Allow me, my dearly beloved, to repeat both for you and myself that *Oportet jam nos de somno surgere*.¹⁵ These words are applied by the saints not only to sinners in need of conversion, but to all the redeemed children of God who are thereby fervently stimulated to strive for extraordinary holiness. *The time has come*: while preaching to others, we must not become worse than they. *The time has come*: we must protect ourselves from the snares of the one who is the enemy of all and who attacks the ministers of Christ's Gospel and holy religion with special energy. *The time has come*: we must arm ourselves with courage, generosity and invincible zeal so that we all may be one with Jesus Christ. *The time has come*: we must grow in virtue, continue to exercise deep humility before God, and acquire compassion in behalf of our fellow human beings. All this must be based upon the spirit of prayer. The time is at hand when we are, to develop that interior virtue which counterbalances the influence of our exterior occupations. We must realize our grave responsibilities to God because of our very special and sublime vocation. Therefore, we say with the Prophet, *Exercebar, et scopebam spiritum*

¹³ You are part of a building that has the apostles and prophets for its foundations, and Christ Jesus himself for its main cornerstone. Eph 2:20

¹⁴ With strokes of the healthful chisel. *Coelistis Urbs Jerusalem*

¹⁵ The time has come: you must wake up now" Rom 13:11

*meum.*¹⁶ ... *Judicium enim sine misericordia hiis, qui praesunt.*¹⁷

II. The call to the Congregation: an examination of conscience

Let us then meditate on the motives that prompted us to devote ourselves to this great Society. Let us also examine the dispositions with which we have carried out our duties up to now. Have we perhaps been discouraged by trials and tribulations, instead of meditating on the words of the Apostle: *Superabundo gaudio in omni tribulatione nostra*,¹⁸ Or were we negligent in our duties and in the observance of the Rule given to us? After all, we must remember that the Rule is only a summary, shall we say, of what we preach to others of our calling and whose practice we demand of them. They are principles, however, that we ourselves may fail to, practice because of certain wellknown excuses, which are, in reality, *sub specie boni*¹⁹, only diabolical delusions, calculated to disturb and offset the attainment of virtue in its beginnings and from its very foundations. Clinging to one's own opinions and rejecting the advice of others, one can be led to believe that he is in our Society for a purpose other than the one that is understood to be properly its own. But, such is the miserable condition of humans, so that the saying of the saints is only too true: we are all patients in the hospital of the world. Infirmities are cured, however, by the of meekness, tenderness, docility; by overcoming selflove through a victorious obedience to our superiors; by supporting our superiors; by supporting each other in mutual, charitable love²⁰; by patiently correcting each other; and finally, by steadfastly bearing with one another.

Not the walls that surround us nor the men with whom we live, but rather the victory over our own will, even in spiritual things that mystic childhood to which Christ calls us - the desire for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, these alone will make us more perfect. They form, as it were, I the framework of the holiness which is lacking in us and which we must absolutely seek to attain as the consequence of this retreat.

III. Conversion and Sanctification

¹⁶ I pondered and my spirit asked this question. Ps 77:6

¹⁷ Ruthless judgment is reserved for the high and mighty. Wis 6:6

¹⁸ In all our trouble ... my joy is overflowing. 2 Cor 7:4

¹⁹ Under the appearances of good.

²⁰ Cf. Eph 4:2

*Expurgate vetus fermentum.*²¹ ... *Induimini Dominum nostrum Jesus Christum.*²² Woe to us if love of our own convenience, if insubordination, unfaithfulness to our good resolutions, or of leading a life of the spirit should make us guilty before God! Truly, our Society will progress the more happily in proportion to our becoming men of the spirit. Despite the suffering and hardships, which are always present, the enemy shall never triumph. *Cum infirmor potens sum.*²³ ... *Inquirentes Dominum non minuentur in omni bono.*²⁴ Through the goodness of our most loving Father, we shall indeed see in ourselves continuous miracles of grace. He has loved and still loves us dearly. He tenderly shows us his Sacred Heart as a sweet asylum for souls thirsting for Jesus Christ. Could it be possible that we custodians and dispensers of the heavenly treasures be deprived of the riches which adorned the daughters of Sion? Indeed, neither the place where we live nor the the insignia we wear form the essentials of holiness. On the contrary, a holy life, desire for perfection, thirst for the love of God, confidence in him, willingness to bear cheerfully all sacrifices for his sake, these are the qualities that make us saints. Father P. Segneri, Sr., says that people usually revere and venerate us. But, it is one thing to appear as a saint outwardly, and another, to be one in reality. *Non enim qui semetipsum commendat ille probatus, sed quem Deus commendat.*²⁵ If, until now, we have not seen a greater triumph of the divine glory in the work that we have done, we must attribute the insufficiency to ourselves, for our words did not flow from a truly contrite heart, or at least, not adequately contrite, at the feet of the Crucified.

Let us, therefore, pray for one another! and put all our trials in the wounds of the crucified Jesus. There we shall find a healing remedy consolation, encouragement and salvation. Let us sincerely love our Society *in osculo santo*²⁶ so that *et in novitate vitae ambulemus,*²⁷ But above all, let us continually watch that the enemy does not deceive us; *et pax Dei, quae exuperat omnem sensum, custodiat corda et intelligentias nostras in charitate Dei, et patientia Christi. Amen.*²⁸

²¹ So get rid of all the old yeast" I Cor 5:7

²² Let your armor be the Lord Jesus Christ. Rom 13:14

²³ For it is when I am weak that I am strong. 2 Cor 12:10

²⁴ Those who seek Yahweh lack nothing good. Ps 34:10

²⁵ It is not the man who commends himself that can be accepted, but the, man who is commended by the Lord. 2 Cor 10:18

²⁶ With the holy kiss. 1 Thes 5:26

²⁷ We too might live a new life. Rom 6:4

²⁸ And may the peace of God which is so much greater than we can understand, guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus. Amen. Phil 4:7

To the BROTHERS

Care and solicitude for your souls are deeply impressed upon our hearts, for God says that *Si quis suorum, et maxime domesticorum, curam no habet, fidem negavit.*²⁹ It would therefore be preposterous for us to break the bread of the Gospel for others and see you die of hunger. But praise and bless God who *replet in bonis desiderium vestrum.*³⁰ He has given you a proof of his concern for your welfare, especially this year in the holy retreat which we need for our spiritual renewal. I would like you to make three resolutions during these special days. The first refers to God, the second to yourselves, and the third to the Society in which you live.

I. God

In regard to God, thank him for having freed you from the many dangers of the world. Exclaim with St. Mary Magdelene de Pazzi: "O blessed walls! You enclose me, but you also defend me." As you make your way in virtue, the daily bread with which you are to nourish and strengthen your souls in profound humility is that vivid awareness of the presence of God and that realization of having to give an account for the gifts that God bestows upon you.

II. You yourselves

As for yourselves, remember that living in a Community house requires especially the resolution of laying aside the old Adam. I mean that you should subdue your passions and imitate Jesus Christ. Therefore, overcome your anger by patience, selfishness by charity, and negligence by justice. You are no longer your own, but you belong to Jesus Crucified. Your holiness of life and your good example should therefore be a continuous Mission to the people. And since we are debtors to both the wise and the unwise, guard well your looks, words and actions. Even though you may at times escape the eyes of your superior, you cannot evade the allseeing eye of God, before whose court you must appear.

III. The Community

Finally, since you are accustomed to attribute to the Society itself the defects that are the faults of individuals, I urge you to look upon our Society as a spiritual field where virtue is to be cultivated. Does not God, at times, permit the intellect of virtuous souls to be darkened, which,

²⁹ Anyone who does not look after his own relatives, especially if they are living with him, has rejected the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. 1 Tm 5:8

³⁰ Fills your years with prosperity. Ps 103:5

as a consequences demands a more heroic virtue on your part? Be careful not to cause the least discord. Be lovers of silence; shun criticism and ridicule which are injurious to both charity and perfection. Let all things be stepping stones to heaven. Deny your own will and accept the bitter things for sweet and the sweet for bitter, and you will be saints. Whoever sows the field, sows with fatigue and labor. In the field of the Gospel, we sow with patience and suffering.

Did you think, perhaps, that Community life would be free from crosses? You deceive yourselves. Did you perhaps enter the Society from human motives and not divine to escape reproaches at home, to rid yourselves of the yoke of paternal authority, to evade labor in the fields, to suffer no deprivation in your life, and the like? If you love the Society, my dear Brothers, change your minds. Look into yourselves and if you admire virtue as it exists in others, then you too should practice it incessantly. Let the Society and every one of its members be dear to you. Put aside all hatred, aversion, prejudice and pride. In their place put charity, docility, humility, prudence and a sincere desire for the success of the Community where you are in service. In short, let the Society be your way to heaven. Amen.

Words of Advice³¹

Let whoever conducts the spiritual exercises first practice what he preaches, lest he be told: *Medice cura te ipsum*.³² Or, perhaps, he will say: *et ne sum aliis predicaverit, ipse reprobis efficiatur*.³³ May he shed many tears before the Lord and preach by giving good example, which must proceed from a pure heart, rather than from words alone.

Let those who give orders learn how to serve. They should rule their confreres by exhortation rather than by command. In example, prayer and charity, let them excel all others, joyfully and promptly administering to the needs of all. Always show prudence, polite manners and a wellordered courtesy toward each other. Our hearts must be free from all things foreign to our calling and occupation. Love to talk with God. Be an apostle while working in the Missions and a contemplative at home, but be this in accordance with the Rule. Finally be angelic in all

³¹ *Qui evangelizat in Exercitiis sciat prius sibi applicare, quae aliis insinuat, ne sit illi: Medice cura te ipsum; et ne cum aliis predicaverit, ipse reprobis efficiatur. Igitur coram Domino profusus lacrymis vacet, et longius loquatur ex exemplo, quod ex corde puro procedere debet.*

Qui praest, scit subesse. Regat fratres hortando, potiusquam imperando. Praecedat omnes exemplo, oratione, charitate; serviat indesinenter necessitatibus omnium hilari, ac prompto animo.

Inter fratres sit discretio, suavitas in agendo, recta et sana educatio. Sit cor nostrum vacuum ab omnibus inopportunis.

Amet unusquisque loqui cum Deo, et sit Apostolus in Ministeriis; contemplativus domi, juxta modum autem, et normam praescriptam. Sit demum Angelus in omnibus viis ejus.

³² Physician, heal yourself. Lk 4:23

³³ Having been an announcer myself, I should not want to be disqualified. 1 Cor 9:27

your actions.

To the SEMINARIANS

During the retreat, let the students keep before their minds the purpose of the Society. The assaults of the devil are directed especially against the young. All must know, therefore, that his attacks are to be strenuously resisted. May the Father make them spiritually keen and wary. May he point out to them the way of salvation.³⁴

Second Letter - 1827

2. The Apostolic Life and the Interior Life

1827

Praise to the Most Precious Blood of Jesus Christ

Circular Letter on the occasion of the Holy Spiritual Exercises of 1827

To The MISSIONARIES

My dear brothers, the days for our spiritual retreat, a time deserving of our greatest attention, are again at hand. *Tempus visitationis advenit.*³⁵ Our most loving God calls us to the mystical mountain. Moses of old received the supreme commandments of the Most High from the midst of the burning thorn bush so that he might later carry them out faithfully. In like manner should we upon the mountain of perfection heed the voice of our most affectionate Father so that we might afterwards be able to communicate his divine will to others. How should we not humble ourselves before God when contemplating our sublime calling and the

³⁴ *Ante oculos in Excercitiis habeant finem Instituti. Cognoscant omnes pugnandum esse fortite contra daemonum, qui cor juvenum specialiter. Hinc Pater in spiritu reddat eos cautos, et circumspectos, et viam salutis, ut ita dicam, digito demonstret.*

³⁵ The time of visitation has arrived. Lk 19:44.

responsibilities which we have in virtue of our sacred duties, our talents granted by the Lord, and the heavenly treasures entrusted to our care!

Attacks still besetting the Church, the deplorable condition of the times, our deficiency in the wisdom of the saints, our habitual remissness at divine services and the disregard for our Rule - a spiritual guide to remind us of the obligations which we have assumed, at the foot of the altar these, dearly beloved, are the cause for our plea to God for the flood of tears that we should shed in the shadow of the Cross. If, in last year's retreat God inspired us to recall together the obligations we

have to further the progress of our Society, this year he imbues us with a salutary counsel proceeding from the sentiments we then experienced. This was the counsel that the two missionaries, Blessed (St.) Leonard and Venerable (St.) Paul of the Cross, communicated to each other in reciprocal love: The apostolic life is based upon the interior life of the spirit.

I. The Interior Life animated by Charity

So, are we men of the spirit? Do we have that love of God which qualifies us to enter the sanctuary and to be teachers of the people and sanctifiers of their souls? If we ourselves are not deeply affected by the very truths which are to move the people to tears, we will be *sicut aes sonans, et cymbalum tinniens*. ...³⁶ Even though we may sacrifice our health in the ministry, what will it avail us if we are not entirely animated with charity? *Si tradidero corpus meum ita, ut ardeam, charitatem autem non habuero, nihil sum.*³⁷ But how blessed are we if, at the foot of the Cross, we acquire the life of the spirit. This life is, indeed, the soul of every holy undertaking! Then everyone, being absorbed in God, will be able to understand and repeat the words of the Apostle: *Gratia Dei sum id, quod sum.*³⁸ *Quid habes quod non accepisti?*³⁹ And also: *Non sum dignus vocari Apostoli.*⁴⁰ *Si quid gloriabor in infirmitatibus meis.*⁴¹ *Ego autem minimus sum Apostolorum.*⁴² *Castigo corpus meum, et in servitutum redigo, ne cum aliis*

³⁶ Simply a gong booming or a cymbal clashing. Cor 13:1

³⁷ If I even let them take my body to burn it, but am without love, it do me no good whatever. 1 Cor 13:3

³⁸ By God's grace that is what I am. 1 Cor 15:10

³⁹ What do you have that was not given to you? I Cor 4:7

⁴⁰ I hardly deserve the name apostle." 1 Cor 15:9

⁴¹ If I am to boast, then let me boast of my own feebleness. 2 Cor 11:30. Cf. also 12:5

⁴² I am the least of the apostles. 1 Cor 15:9

*praedicaverim, ipse reprobus efficiar.*⁴³

These are the principles, my most beloved, *quos diligo, charitate non*⁴⁴, *in visceribus Jesu Christi*⁴⁵ which beget in us the internal life of union with God. Certainly the soul imbued with these thoughts will exclaim: *Vivo ego jam non ego, vivit vero in me Christus.*⁴⁶ Father Avila, a very able teacher of the spiritual life, once wrote that only when the love of God reigns in the heart, will one feed the flock of the Lord well. Therefore, he was accustomed to repeat the words of Christ to St. Peter: *Si me amas, pasce oves meas*⁴⁷ It was this love that urged the Apostle to say: *Optabam anathema esse pro fratribus meis.*⁴⁸ This love sweetened the sufferings during his apostolate; so that he said: *Superabundo gaudio in omni tribulatione.*⁴⁹ This divine love, finally, urged him incessantly to acquire the wisdom of the saints by which he considered all other things as the merest dross: *Omnia arbitror ut stercora, ut Christum lucrifaciam ... Omnia arbitror detrimentum esse propter eminentem scientiam Jesu Christi.*⁵⁰

II. Dead to ourselves, let us live for Jesus crucified.

We may ask: how shall we become enkindled by this heavenly fire? I will not answer because I, too, am in need of being enkindled by this heavenly fire. God himself, however, will answer with the following analogy. A reed is very susceptible to the action of fire because it is hollow and thus is easily enveloped by the flames. Now, *are we emptied of ourselves?* Let answer to this question constitute the true test for this retreat. *Fulgebunt justi, tamquam scintillae in arundineto discurrent.*⁵¹ Truly, my dearly beloved, the evil of which we must rid ourselves is rooted within us not within the walls that surround us, not in our fellowworkers, nor in the

⁴³ I treat my body hard and make it obey me, for, having been an announcer myself, I should not want to be disqualified. Cor 9:27

⁴⁴ Whom I love with unfeigned charity. 2 Cor 6:6

⁴⁵ In the heart of Jesus Christ. Phil 1:8.

⁴⁶ I live now not with my own life but with the life of Christ who lives in me. Gal 2:20

⁴⁷ If you love me, look after my sheep. Cf. Jn 21 :17

⁴⁸ I would willingly be condemned and be cut off from Christ if it could help my brothers. Rom 9:3

⁴⁹ In all our trouble, I am filled with consolation and my joy is overflowing. 2 Co 7:4

⁵⁰ I look on everything as so much rubbish if only I can have Christ ... I want only the perfection that comes through faith in Christ. Phil 3:8

⁵¹ They will shine out; as sparks run through the stubble, so will they. Wis 3 :7

places where we live. Herein lies the cure: spiritually to be dead to all the world and to live only for Jesus Crucified. I know very well that I am speaking to men of the spirit, but they are the ones whom the common enemy of good molests most severely. Therefore, carry out what has been counseled so that *ad confirmanda corda nostra*⁵² *in charitate Dei, et patientia Christi. Amen.*⁵³

2. Three Flowers of Most Holy Mary

Relections for the BOARDERS

*Flores apparuerunt in terra nostra ... Fulcite me floribus.*⁵⁴

In the garden of the Church, Mary gathers three flowers and places them into your hands: the white lily, the red rose, the pale violet. The lily is the symbol of purity of conscience of life. The rose represents that burning love which purifies, perfects and elevates the heart to God. The violet is the emblem of the evangelical mortification which keeps us *canditus, et rubicundus*⁵⁵ according to the desire of the Beloved of our heart *et pascitur inter lilia.*⁵⁶ The picture of the lily draws you away from the world. The image of the rose unites you with the heart of Jesus. Finally, the violet makes you partakers of the fruits of the Cross of Jesus. May the most holy Virgin who presents you with these flowers, find them still in your hands in your last agony as a pledge for entrance into the home to which only the pure lovers of Jesus Crucified are admitted.

2. To Live for God and with God

Reflections for the BROTHERS

Dearly beloved in Jesus Christ: the Lord has again visited you with the grace of a spiritual retreat. In the name of God, I shall place before you three considerations about which you should humbly examine yourselves. The first refers to the goal for which you withdrew into our midst, the second to the mode life you lead with us, the third to the dispositions with which

⁵² He confirm your hearts in holiness" 1 Thes 3:13

⁵³ Toward the love of God and the for fortitude of Christ. Amen. 2 Thes 3:5

⁵⁴ The flowers appear on the earth ... stay me up with flowers. Sg 2:512

⁵⁵ Fresh and ruddy Cf. Sg 5:10

⁵⁶ Who pastures his flock among the lilies. Sg 2:16. Cf. also Sg: 6:2

you entered upon this present retreat.

St. Bernard asked his monks: *My children, for what purpose are we in the monastery?* Meditate on this question yourselves and closely examine what brought you to the Society. The purpose must be the welfare of your soul. This, in a few words, says it all.

What sort of life are we to follow? Not the walls that enclose us, nor solely the Rule which guides us, will make us saints. Holiness is the result of mortifying the passions and of prayerful union with God. Indulging in selflove, lacking docility and respect, failing to love our Society deeply, or maintaining harmony among yourselves all of this constitutes opposition to the spiritual life. May heaven protect you against such diabolical evils.

Enter upon this holy retreat, therefore, holding in your hands the book of the Crucifix. Shield yourselves against the onslaughts of hell by fleeing to the protection of Mary. Finally, strike down the pride of Lucifer with the powerful weapon of prayer. Live for God, my beloved, live in his presence. Unite yourselves solely and most intimately with him. Then you will be holy and blessed. Amen.

Sermoneta, 23 October 1827

THIRD LETTER - 1829

3. Vigilance of the Apostle over Himself

1829

To the MISSIONARIES

*Attende tibi, lectioni, exhortationi, et doctrinae; noli negligere gratiam, quae data est tibi per impositionem manuum presbyterii*⁵⁷

Dear brothers, having these words of the Apostle in mind, we return this year to the

⁵⁷ "Make use of the time ... by reading to the people, preaching and teaching. You have in you a spiritual gift which was given to you when the prophets spoke and the body of elders laid their hands on you; do not let it lie unused." 1Tm 4:1314

spiritual exercises which may be the last of our lives! Should not devotion to the ministry and its responsibility before God and the people call us to a most studious examination of our lives? If St. Paul, that exalted preacher of the Gospel, trembled, *Ne cum aliis praedicaverim reprobus efficiar.*⁵⁸ what, then, should be our portion who, in the light of so many circumstances, find every motive to truthfully acknowledge before the Divine Presence: *Non sum dignus vocari apostolus.*⁵⁹ ... *Si quid gloriabor, gloriabor in infirmitatibus meis.*⁶⁰ How important it is, therefore, to understand what the Apostle emphasizes in his letter to the Thessalonians: *Date operam ut quieti sitis, et vestrum negotium agatis.*⁶¹ Certainly, it is upon these points that we must direct our examination to achieve what is implied in the text quoted: *Attende tibi.*⁶²

I. Watch over yourselves

"*Make a point*": Is it not possible that while we are busy with others, we neglect ourselves, or at least not sufficiently provide for our own soul? Time goes by; eternity is the great goal of all. We are the dispensers of the sacred mysteries. May we never experience what happens to those who toll and labor to amass a fleeting treasure! They already have the reward of their work, and yet that treasure is not their own. Let us conduct ourselves as we should, making use of the proper means. How often do we not dispense the divine treasures to others and we ourselves remain, perhaps, poor and needy through our own fault? *Attende, adunque, tibi, ut resuscites gratiam, quae data est per impositionem manuum presbyterii.*⁶³ From these considerations it does not follow that we should abandon what we have undertaken, namely, the apostolate among the people; for, *Hoc enim faciens*, as St. Paul continues to say, *te ipsum salvum facies, et alios.*⁶⁴

II. Three points for your examination and three means for attaining the end

⁵⁸ For, having been an announcer myself, I should not want to be disqualified. 1 Cor 9:27

⁵⁹ I hardly deserve the name apostle. 1 Cor 15:9

⁶⁰ I shall be happy to make my weaknesses my special boast. 2 Cor 12:9; cf. 2 Cor 11:30

⁶¹ Make a point of living quietly, attending to your own business... 1 Thes 4:11

⁶² Make a point. 1 Tm 4:16

⁶³ Make a point ... Fan into a flame the gift that God gave you when I laid my hands on you. 2 Tm 4:16

⁶⁴ In this way you will save both yourself and those who listen to you. 1 Tm 4:16

This year, our examination at the foot of the Cross, shall center in a particular way on three points. First, the acknowledgment of our shortcomings from which arises our deficiency before God. Secondly, the examination of our observance of interior discipline,⁶⁵ which may be called *Manuductio ad Coelum*.⁶⁶ Finally, we shall direct our attention, prudently and reflectively, to the external aspects of our apostolic work, not merely to have knowledge of good in general, but to seek the greater good which can and must be furthered. With perfect uprightness and zeal we must seek the greater glory of the God whom we serve. This searching of the heart will move us to practice what the Prophet proclaims: *Exercebar, et scopebam spiritum meum*.⁶⁷ Furthermore, this searching will make us eager to find the means for the attainment of our purpose. These means are threefold: a continuous inner conversation with God about our needs, and interests; a deep study of humility, that we may be capable of receiving special gifts from God for the renewal of our life; and a burning desire for the inner and hidden life in the adorable wounds of the Crucified. There we will derive strength to wage war against Satan and gain over him glorious victories: *Mortuus sum, et vita mea abscondita est cum Cristo in Deo*.⁶⁸

III. Three obstacles in the ways to God

To the things mentioned so far, we add yet a warning to forestall three obstacles which ordinarily constitute a hindrance for those walking in the ways of the Lord. Whenever evangelical fortitude does not inspire us with the knowledge needed to overcome those obstacles, faithful communion with God will be effective.

The first of these obstacles is our innate weakness. Our common tempter uses it against us under the guise of outstanding, though passing, virtue. From this flow sluggishness, laziness, dejection and even the temptation to disgust at good itself: *Defecit virtus mea, then, lumen oculorum meorum non est mecum*.⁶⁹

To what lengths does not the devil go to harm those who work for the glory of God? But *ipsi vicerunt draconem propter Sanguinem agni*.⁷⁰ One glance at the divine Blood and we are aroused to toil with untiring zeal and to work in the true spirit of God: for, *Hi sunt filii Dei, qui*

⁶⁵ Cf. Rule, Title 11

⁶⁶ The Guide To Heaven.

⁶⁷ I pondered and my spirit asked this question. Ps 77:7

⁶⁸ Because I have died, and now the life I have is hidden with Christ in God. Col 3:3

⁶⁹ ... my strength deserting me, the light of my eyes itself has left me. Ps 38:11

⁷⁰ ... they have triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb. Rv 12:11

*spiritu Dei aguntur.*⁷¹ We shall work but we shall be so well established in virtue that in our labors no demand from the flesh and blood nor any other desire will ever be heeded: *Caro, et sanguis non revelabit tibi.*⁷² We shall work, indeed, but with joy and holy delight in God. We know that even though we now encourage each other to labor with joy and elation, later we shall bear the Cross of Jesus Christ in victory and triumph unto a most blissful eternity. Since this Cross is the golden ladder to heaven, we shall never cease to exclaim: *Superabundo gaudio in omni tribulatione nostra.*⁷³

The second obstacle which may retard our apostolic growth is excessive attachment to our own opinions, views and desires. From this flows the weakness to which I referred previously. Realizing this, the Apostle exclaims: *Ego vincetus Christi.*⁷⁴ which is the equivalent to saying: I desire to be bound by love to Jesus alone. If we think of the manner in which the Almighty manifests his will, this heavenly love will force us to cry out: *Quis me separabit a charitate Christi?*⁷⁵ Every other bond is severed the will of the Lord alone is triumphant!

The last obstacle against which we must carefully guard is lack of prayerfulness. Through prayer God communicates divine light, and the soul acquires heavenly wisdom. Precisely from a neglect of prayer come the dangers already set before you as a warning. In thinking of divine things, our hearts are like a ship which, though buffeted by destructive winds and furious storms, carries its precious cargo safely to port. In other words, a prayerful soul, fixing its gaze on God, does not suffer shipwreck on the stormy sea of this world.

These are the sentiments, dearly beloved, which we impart during the present retreat for our mutual edification. We hope they will produce in everyone those corresponding effects which are indeed the fruit of the divine word. May these exercises be our mystical food and drink to fulfill the sacred injunction: *Edentes et bibientes pergite principes.*⁷⁶ This text means: let us arise the Cross of Christ established for us: *Principatus ejus super humerum ejus.*⁷⁷ *Domuit orbem non ferro, sed ligno.*⁷⁸ Triumphant over the passions, over the world, over the infernal enemy, we

⁷¹ Everyone moved by the Spirit is a son of God. Rom 8:14

⁷² It was not flesh and blood that revealed this to you. Mt 16:17

⁷³ In all our trouble, my joy is overflowing. 2 Cor 7:4

⁷⁴ So I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus. Epes 3:1

⁷⁵ Nothing therefore can come between us and the love of Christ ... Rm 8:35

⁷⁶ They eat and they drink ... Rise up, O Princes ... ! Is 21:5

⁷⁷ And dominion is laid on his shoulders. Is 9:6

⁷⁸ He conquered the world not with the sword, but with the Cross. St. Augustine, De Conc. Matt.

shall one day chant the new canticle of exultation throughout the eternal years: *Cantabimus canticum novum in terra viventium*.⁷⁹ So may it be, dearest brothers, through the help of the Mother of God and the protection of St. Francis Xavier.

3. Those called to the Apostolic Vocation

To the Young Boarders

*Superaedificati super fundamentum Apostolorum et Prophetarum, ipso summo angulari lapide Christo Jesu.*⁸⁰

These are the wishes of the Society to which you, my dear seminarians, have dedicated yourselves, that now being in the house of your sanctification to accomplish the designs of our holy mother the Church, you may verify the sacred words just quoted: *Superaedificati*.⁸¹

I. Like the Apostles

The apostles were called to follow the Redeemer: *relictis omnibus secuti sunt eum*.⁸² You are likewise called to the apostolic mission. By the grace of God you have left your homes and all that could hinder your generous steps to the priesthood, and now you are in the house of God. Admire God's fatherly watchfulness over you: *Ecce nunc benedicite Dominum, omnes servi Domini, que satis in domo Domini*.⁸³ The apostles, indeed, at first generously welcomed and with, fulness of heart followed the Savior. But latter they became timid and weak to such a degree that deserted him during the Passion: *omnes relicto eo fugerunt*.⁸⁴ So, it sometimes happens that a person dedicates himself freely to God, but in the course of time what havoc does not the infernal enemy effect, and that at the expense of conscience? How often does not your want of fervor open the way to disillusionment, gloom, melancholy and even regret of the step you have taken? This is a source of delight for the enemy, But woe to you if prompt resistance is

⁷⁹ We shall sing a new song . . . in the land of the living. Cf. Ps 144:9

⁸⁰ You are part of a building that has the apostles and prophets for its foundations, and Christ Jesus himself for its main cornerstone. Eph 2:20

⁸¹ You are part of a building. Eph 2:20

⁸² They left everything and followed him. Lk 5:11

⁸³ Come, bless Yahweh, all you who serve Yahweh, serving in the house of Yahweh. Ps 134:1

⁸⁴ Then all the disciples deserted him and ran away. Mt 26:56

not offered to his diabolical suggestions!

II. Gathered together in the Holy Cenacle

How did the Lord deal with his apostles? He assembled them in the holy Cenacle under the august patronage of his own Mother. Then he called them to recollection, silence and prayer that they thereby implore a renewal of spirit and religious generosity: *virtute magna reddebant testimonium Jesu Christi*.⁸⁵ So, too, God works in us during the days of retreat in order to be able to anticipate and forestall every attack of the devil.

My dear young men, God has called you to this figurative Cenacle, this retreat. He wishes to communicate his spirit to you in a particular way. He wants to strengthen your hearts, fortify you with virtue and lead you to holiness; so that you may leave this retreat spiritually refreshed and with the enthusiasm of youth be able to fight the enemy of your soul with greater strength and courage. When you have subdued your foes from within, may you become apostles of God's glory.

III. Prepare yourselves to conquer

For you the hour of the great apostolate has not yet come, but the time to acquire the necessary dispositions is your work now. Now you must learn how to handle the spiritual weapons: *Docet manus meas ad proelium*.⁸⁶ Now the necessary provisions for the struggle are being made. Now the ambush of the enemy is exposed and the plan laid for his defeat. Is not this a great apostolic groundwork? Dearly beloved, take these words to heart. Listen with docility, as did Samuel in the temple, to the promptings of grace, and guard it carefully.

III. Under the guidance of teachers

Ponder well the full meaning of the text previously cited: "You are part of a building, that has the apostles and prophets for its foundations, and Christ Jesus himself for its main cornerstone."

As the prophets of old proclaimed future events, so now will your superiors lovingly and zealously make known to you the means for learning those things which pertain to the sacred ministry. (For God has given them to you as guides in your career to aid you in building upon the mystic foundation of the apostles which always rests on the mystical rock, Jesus Christ). Your superiors will warn you of the dangers that will be met. They will announce to you what Jesus

⁸⁵ The apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord with great power. Acts 4:33

⁸⁶ This God ... who trains my hand for battle. Cf. 2 Sm 22:35, Ps 17 (18):35

himself declared to us: *Eritis odio omnibus hominibus propter nomen meum.*⁸⁷ *Ecce ego mitto vos sicut oves in medio luporum.*⁸⁸ They will support you as you fight your battles valiantly. In the name of Jesus, they will offer you the assurance which is promised in the sacred pages: *Vicenti dabo manna absconditum et nomen novum.*⁸⁹ That manna is indeed everything that God has prepared for you as the food of your souls, your sustenance and support as you walk the way to perfection. May the spirit of humility toward God, meekness toward your neighbor and charity among yourselves direct you in this holy task that you have begun. Remember that *nemo, mittens manum suam ad aratrum, et respiciens retro aptus est regno Dei.*⁹⁰

May the grace, peace, and love of Jesus always be with you. May the powerful protection of Mary and the great Xavier be our support in life, our comfort at the time of death, and our introduction into the holy kingdom of God. Amen.

3. Living in the Institute

To the BROTHERS

*Elegi abjectus esse in domo Dei mei, magis quam habitare in tabernaculis peccatorum.*⁹¹

Dear Brothers: This is the mystical house in which you are sheltered for one purpose only, namely, to flee the dangers of the world with a greater spirit of perfection and to seek earnestly to imitate Jesus. *Elegi abjectus esse, etc.*⁹²

I. Imitate Jesus

But how is Jesus to be imitated? Look at him for just a short while. As an example to us, he is obedient to Joseph and to Mary and lives in the humblest of homes. He is employed in manual labor, shows himself to be a model of silence and is withdrawn from the world, a benefactor to all. In persecution and mockery, he holds his peace and forgives those who mistreat him. Tortured and afflicted, the Man of sorrows, he joyfully embraces the cross for the welfare of

⁸⁷ You will be hated by all men on account of my name. Mt. 14:9

⁸⁸ Remember, I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Mt 10:16

⁸⁹ To those who prove victorious I will give the hidden manna ... a new name. Cf. Rv. 2:17

⁹⁰ Once the hand is laid on the plough, no one who looks back is fit for the kingdom of God. Lk 9:62

⁹¹ Merely to stand on the steps of God's house is better than living with the wicked. Ps 84:11

⁹² Merely to stand on the steps, etc. Ps 84:11

souls and on it completes the Great Sacrifice. Strive, dearly beloved, that *vita Jesu manifestetur in vobis*.⁹³

II. The virtues of a brother

At the time you became members of the Society, perhaps the world with scorn and derision sought to make you falter in your determination. Satan, too, desired that the love of comfort, attachment to your own opinions, rudeness in conduct, and selfwill should replace your good resolutions and a life of service to God. What, then, did the good Lord do? He showed you a way to ground yourselves in humility, obedience, and sacrifice in the hidden and modest life. He rejoices to hear you repeat: *Elegi abjectus esse*.⁹⁴ Open the eyes of your minds and learn that everyone is called to suffer, and that through that suffering, virtue strikes deeper roots in the hearts of all. Therefore, in your desire to imitate Christ, set aside all complaints. May evangelical simplicity, obedience to your directors, and reverence towards the ways of Providence make your life virtuous not only in name but in deed.

III. Apostolate of the Brothers

While there are many "brothers" (we are all brothers in Jesus Christ) contributing to the achievement of good works, it is you in particular who relieve them of numerous obligations which would lessen their activity for the glory of God. The designation "Auxiliary Brothers" describes your calling. Seek, then, to be of service to the Society and respect the will of the Creator in his creatures. No task is menial if it tends to glorify the Almighty. On the contrary, your work is similar to that of Jesus Christ who aided his foster father, St. Joseph. Purity of intention alone is necessary for you to properly regulate your interior and exterior actions. Realize, too, that a hidden and humble life is a special shield against vanity and human glory.

In concluding, I would like to describe what I feel you should be in the moral order. I shall use the example of Noah's dove and the ark. The Society is, for you, an ark. It shelters you. The dove represents the purity of life you should possess. The mission of the dove is an example of the duties that you are given to do. You are sent out on your mission to defeat the crafty enemy of souls. You should return, carrying an olive branch, the symbol of victory and triumph, to the ark as did Noah's white dove. Therefore, live for God through the holiness of your conduct. Live with him in service to his Society, our Institute to which you have dedicated your lives. Always live in God by walking in his presence, conscious that he is everywhere. Do this not only to

⁹³ Always, wherever we may be, we carry with us in our body the death of Jesus. 2 Cor 4:10

⁹⁴ Merely to stand on the steps of God's house. Ps 84:11

become holy, but also to be perfected, in holiness: *Ambula coram me et esto perfectus*.⁹⁵ Through the intercession of Blessed Mary and of our special advocate St. Francis Xavier, may the Almighty fill you with heavenly blessings. Amen.

FOURTH LETTER - 1830

4. Renew in yourselves the Internal Life of the Spirit

1830

Hail to the Most Precious Blood of Jesus Christ

Encouragement

for the Exercises of November of 1830

Note that where there are no Boarders,
omit the reading of the articles that pertain to our young.

To the MISSIONARIES

Dear brothers, the ever memorable time has returned in which God calls us to the holy retreat. This year, in particular, it must be for us a mystical fountain of heavenly blessings. In during the past year it has been our endeavor, through various leaflets sent to our mission houses, to arouse and promote the participation of all in our Institute in the multiple commitments and occupations for accomplishing good. In so doing, we carry out the will of God who, having called us to the apostolate, delights in seeing perfection in good deeds which conform to the sovereign designs of Providence. In those leaflets, we have gone into minute detail in so far as it pleases the Almighty to see exactitude in small things - pictured by him with the image of a delicate hair as well as in matters of great import which he symbolizes with the image of the pupil of the eye. *Vulnerasti cor meum in uno oculorum tuorum in uno crine colli tui*.⁹⁶ But, even, being equipped with all of this as a foundation and it is something that tends, of itself, to effect orderliness and fruitful merit by its acquisition - we could never expect to see anything duly accomplished without having a truly interior life of the spirit. That spirit in the just must always be renewed in order to cooperate fully with God's benevolent will. We do not deny that up to

⁹⁵ Walk in my presence and be blameless. Gen 17:1

⁹⁶ You have ravished my heart with one glance of your eyes, with one bead of your necklace. Song 4:9

now, by the grace and mercy of God, much has been done for the welfare of our foundations, our houses of studies, and finally for the various branches of our work in the apostolate to which God has deigned to call us.

I. Stimulate virtues in yourself

But have we finished the work which Providence has entrusted to us? Scarcely yet! My beloved brothers: Much remains to be accomplished in holy discipline in our own individual lives, in the Society in which we live and in the apostolate which is under our direction. As for ourselves, have we not every reason to cry out: O great God, who deigned to choose us for the very sublime ministry of your great glory, what far greater progress would we not show, if we were animated with that ennobling spirit of deep humility, unalterable patience and unwearied zeal in response to the heavenly gifts given to us! *Ego sum vir videns paupertatem meam.*⁹⁷ Our self-love, obstinacy in our own views, neglect of the many means well-suited to our perfection offered by the Society - what motives they give us for due sorrow and deep regret in your Presence! Come then O divine Husbandman, visit yet this year, possibly the last of our lives, the mystical vineyard of our souls. *Veni, Domine, visita vineam istam, perfice eam, quam plantavit dextera tua.*⁹⁸

With docility may we listen to your just complains *Vinea mea electa ego te plantavi quomodo conversa es in amaritudinem.*⁹⁹ This is the lament of a father solicitous for the welfare of his children. Already we see in ourselves the fulfilment of the scriptural word: *Anima mea liquefacta est, ut dilectus meus locutus est.*¹⁰⁰ These are days that are blessed by God who speaks to the heart in a special way. He wants to purify and free it from every bond and raise it to lofty aspirations of sanctity, so that our sanctity itself will be resplendent in the external works of our apostolic life. These days are blessed since we are united with Mary in this mystical Cenacle, imploring the gifts of the divine Spirit so that we can conclude our retreat, with the assistance of his grace, by expressing our willingness to fulfill the words of the Scriptures *Fulgebunt iusti; tamquam scintillae in arundinetis discurrunt, iudicabunt nationes. Dominabuntur populis, et regnabit Dominus illorum in perpetuum.*¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ I am the man familiar with misery. Lam 3:1

⁹⁸ Come, Lord, look at this vine, visit it. Protect what your own right hand has planted. Ps 80:15-16

⁹⁹ Yet I had planted you, a choice vine, a shoot of soundest stock. How is it you have become a degenerate plant? Jer 2:21

¹⁰⁰ My soul melted when he spoke. Cf. Sg 5:6 [Vulgate]

¹⁰¹ ... the just will shine out; as sparks run through the stubble, so will they. They shall judge nations, rule over peoples, and the Lord will be their king forever. Wis 3:7-8

II. Give good example to your Confreres in the community

Indeed *Fulgebunt justi*.¹⁰² Behold the evangelical worker who has again put on Jesus Christ *Induimini Dominum nostrum Jesum Christum*.¹⁰³ He, through the mystical lamps of virtue, illuminates his neighbor: *Lampades ejus, lampades ignis, atque flammaram*.¹⁰⁴

The minister of the Gospel is not satisfied, however, to carry out only within himself the supreme will of God by an uninterrupted study of the science of the saints. He seeks, in addition, to edify the others in the Society, especially in the house where he lives. He is convinced that his first duty is to be an example to all. *Fulgebunt justi*.¹⁰⁵ He has regard for every member of the Society, and, indeed, does all to gain all for Jesus Christ. He has sympathy for human wretchedness, understands human deficiency and frailty, seeks to inspire all to put off the old Adam, to be, as we have said, newly clothed in Jesus Crucified. He knows that the first duty of the apostolate be directed toward the care for his own, for *si quis suorum, et maxime domesticorum curam non habet, fidem negavit, et est infideli deterior*.¹⁰⁶ Aware of this fact, what does he not do for the sanctification of all in the adorable Heart of Jesus? How does he not exert himself in all discretion and zeal, that the supreme decrees of God be carried out and our houses be seen as mystical reeds that burn? *Tamquam scintillae in arundineto discurrunt*.¹⁰⁷ Since a reed is hollow and fragile, it is easily swayed by the wind. Thus the soul, to be enveloped by the fire of God's love, will respond to divine grace and endeavor to free itself of the earth and mundane things that stand in the way of the love of God. Furthermore, the soul realizes its own frailty and through that knowledge it does not lose hold of humility. Finally, it comes to recognize the industrious efforts of the devil to upset the soul and therefore cries out: *Fortitudo mea Deus, quem timebo?*¹⁰⁸ It could indeed happen that an apostolic man, realizing that he is deficient in this regard, could seek this example of life from others. Besides prayer, the means that will lead to the attainment of the end include prudence, charity and evangelical meekness. At this point,

¹⁰² The just will shine out. Wis 3:7

¹⁰³ Let your armor be the Lord Jesus Christ. Rom 13-14

¹⁰⁴ The flash of it is a flash of fire, a flame of Yahweh himself. Sg 8:6

¹⁰⁵ The just will shine out. Wis 3:7

¹⁰⁶ Anyone who does not look after his relatives, especially if they are living with him, has rejected the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. 1 Tm 5:8

¹⁰⁷ They shall be as sparks run through the stubble. Wis 3:7

¹⁰⁸ Yahweh is my light and my salvation, whom need I fear? Ps 27:1

each one should examine his own personal conduct towards others of our Society.

III. Make yourself an efficacious instrument of God in the Apostolate

Lastly, a missionary, filled with the true spirit of God, will become an instrument in the hands of the Lord, to confirm the second part of the text quoted previously: *Judicabunt nationes, et dominabuntur populis*.¹⁰⁹ With zeal and the practice of the ministry, *Judicabunt*.¹¹⁰ Because of the prestige which the priesthood enjoys in the estimation of the people, *dominabuntur*¹¹¹ and the luster of God's glory will be radiant. *Regnabit Dominus illorum in perpetuum*.¹¹² In them, vice will find its reproof, and they will not hear the rebuke: *Medice cura te ipsum*.¹¹³ In particular, they will judge sinners, yet in such a manner as urged by the Apostle: *Imitatores mei estote, sicut et ego Christi*.¹¹⁴ They will inculcate a salutary fear of divine judgment with which the one who preaches should also be imbued. They will preach to the heart from the heart, *Non quaerens quae sua sunt, sed quae Jesu Christi*.¹¹⁵ Their bearing will be dignified and humble, prudent, simple, and patient. There will be no room for rivalries, disputes, vanity or self-interest. Their only real interest will be the divine glory, their only spiritual welfare and the welfare of others. As soldiers, they I defend the cause of religion. As indefatigable workers in the evangelical field, they will continually look after the planting of new shoots as well as the care of the older ones, and cultivate them as flourishing vines, to bear out the saying: *Vineae florentes dederunt odorem suum*.¹¹⁶ In addition, they will set up a barrier that will protect the vineyard from being devastated by the enemy of all that is good.

This is the basis for our making a moral application during the conferences delivered at missions and retreats. Our Society urges us to follow this plan, whether we do so in our individual

houses or out among the people in the exercise of our ministry in conducting missions or retreats.

¹⁰⁹ They shall judge nations, they shall rule over peoples. Wis 3:8

¹¹⁰ They shall judge. Wis 3:8

¹¹¹ They shall rule. Wis 3:8

¹¹² And the Lord shall reign for ever and ever. Cf. Rev 11:15

¹¹³ Physician, heal yourself. Lk 4:23

¹¹⁴ I beg you to copy me; ... Take me model, as I take Christ. 1 Cor 4:16; also 11:1

¹¹⁵ Not seeking what is theirs, but what is Jesus Christ's. Cf. Phil 2:21

¹¹⁶ The blossoming vines give out their fragrance. Sg 2:13

And, as a matter of fact, do we not realize that the Lord unceasingly reminds us: *Elegi vos, ut eatis, fructum afferatis, et fructus vester maneat.*¹¹⁷ We must stop to consider in a particular way, the latter part of this saying. Nor can we, without tears, read accounts that St. Paul gives us of his painstaking journeys being without being moved. How frequently he visited his people, and, when he was unable to do so, would send his disciples, or would write ardent letters of encouragement to do good as well as words of admonition to those who had recently fallen into sin, never ceasing to pray for all. Here we have the origin of the occasional sermons required by our Rule¹¹⁸ given in places near our mission houses, or of the tridua in more distant places.

IV. The Blood of Jesus: Fountain of apostolic zeal

At this point, my dear brothers, we must utter the following admonition. Do we feel in our hearts that same burning zeal for the welfare of souls, at least in the area of concern to which God calls us? We must, during this year's retreat, acquire fervor and spiritual thirst for souls. But who will discover it if not he who stands at the mystical fountain of the wounds of Jesus Christ? Meditating, then, on the mysteries of the divine Blood, we will feel a great zeal for the salvation of people, while exclaiming with the Apostle: *Quis infirmatur, et ego no infirmor? Quis scandalizatur, et ego non uror?*¹¹⁹ *Optabam anathema esse a Christo pro fratribus.*¹²⁰

When we imagine that we have lived completely a life in keeping with the high state of our priesthood, we have scarcely begun. We tremble in the sight of God; yet, without losing confidence, let us be thoroughly moved within ourselves because of the responsibilities imposed upon us, and the sluggishness with which we have, perhaps, fulfilled them. In other words, *Cum consummaverit homo, tunc incipiet.*¹²¹ This exhortation anticipates every possibility, precludes every evasion. The times are critical, the conditions are pitiful. Therefore, with even more reason should you pledge yourselves to become the light of the world and the salt of the earth. *Tu vero vigila, in omnibus labora, ministerium tuum imple.*¹²² Lastly, recall also the text: *Si quis mihi*

¹¹⁷ You did choose not choose me, no, I chose you; ... to go out and to bear fruit, fruit that will last. Jn 15:16

¹¹⁸ Rule, Title III, Art. 30

¹¹⁹ When any man has had scruples, I have had scruples with him; when any man is made to fall, I am tortured. 2Cor 11:29

¹²⁰ I would willingly be condemned and cut off from Christ if it could help my brothers. Rom 9:3

¹²¹ When a man finishes, he is only beginning. Sir 18:6

¹²² Be brave under trials; make the preaching of the Good News your life's work, in thoroughgoing service. 2 Tm 4:5

ministraverit, honorificabit eum Pater meus, qui in coelis est. ¹²³ So, let us be resolved not only to walk, but to run along the way of the apostolate. God has called us to this. Let us pray for one another, that in holy concord and unity of spirit, strongly united *in viculis pacis*¹²⁴ *in corde Jesu Christi Crucifixi*,¹²⁵ we may be able to reach our blessed goal of Paradise laden with palms of victory. Amen.

4. Sobriety and Vigilance

1830

To the Boarders

My dear young men, you have already heard the sacred truths of religion regarding the apostolate toward which you are directing your steps in this preparatory, seminary. Allow me, in the place of God and in his adorable name, to direct but one appeal to you. As the Apostle says: *Juvenes, similiter hortare, ut sobrii sint.*¹²⁶

Moderation, then, is especially prescribed for you, besides being enjoined upon all. *Fratres sobrii estote, et vigilate.*¹²⁷ Moderation implies the mortification of our various desires, our perverse inclinations, and our excessive appetites which try to rule the human heart. The enemy, who is the adversary of everything good, vexes young people in particular, and especially priesthood students, to prevent those mystical seedlings from setting deep roots of lasting virtue, or at least not sufficiently deep. The enemy would have them sprout as plants that are not trained to grow straight at the proper time, so that they become twisted and gnarled as they grow.

Be vigilant, therefore, against the outward attacks with which the tempter tries to entrap you. Watch, too, for the interior attacks which he seeks to set against you. Watch over the observance of your Rule which furnishes you with the weapons of defense. Finally, be vigilant in most fervent prayer to God, in your selfexamination during these days, in achieving a renewal in yourselves to the edification of your neighbor, so that, even though you are young in years, you

¹²³ If anyone serves me, my Father will honor him. Jn 12:26

¹²⁴ By the peace that binds you together. Eph 4:3

¹²⁵ In the heart of Jesus Christ Crucified.

¹²⁶ In the same way, you have got to persuade the younger men to be moderate. Ti 2:6

¹²⁷ My brothers, be calm but vigilant. 1 Pt 5:8

may become spiritually mature in virtue. *Cani sunt sensus hominis, in quibus subest scientia Dei.*¹²⁸ Do not fail to continue to pray for the Society which has received you, which educates you for the sanctuary and the temple of God, and directs your steps for the welfare of your souls and for the good of the Church. Amen.

4. Your Service

1830

To the BROTHERS

That the spiritual doctrines which will be explained to you in the course of the retreat bear fruit, receive them, my dearly beloved, in Jesus Christ with these dispositions: 1) as coming from

God who thereby speaks to the heart; 2) as acts of charity on the part of the Society for the benefit of your souls; 3) as means directed for your sanctification.

You are dedicated to the service of the House of God and to the sacred institutions devoted to give him glory. Therefore, glory in your title of "Brothers-in-service," [*Inservienti*] a title which religion ennobles and uplifts, which holiness enlivens and promotes, and which humility especially guards and perfects. You serve God himself in serving his Society. Never think that doing external and earthly work is a hindrance to the welfare of your soul. There is no family or community, not even the most rigorously contemplative, which does not have of this type of undertaking. Only determine that you yourselves will not become the cause of your own spiritual loss.

Learn from Jesus Christ, who during his private life, especially while subjecting himself to his Blessed Mother Mary and St. Joseph, served them in manual labor, so that he was considered to be *Erat filius fabri*.¹²⁹ He teaches us that external and temporal works, when they

¹²⁸ Length of days is not what makes age honorable, nor number of years the true measure of life; understanding, this is man's grey hairs, untarnished life, is ripe old age. Ws 4:8; also 13:1

¹²⁹ The carpenter's son. Mt 13:55

are not separated from the life of the spirit, ground the soul not only in humility, but in patience, charity and meekness. He shows us how they can raise the heart aloft to desires of heavenly things.

When you go about your duties, therefore, think of God in whose immensity we have our being. Think of obedience which sanctifies the entire man. Think of the good example which you give thereby. Make every thought of sadness, dejection and sloth be far removed from you. Serve God, and serve him in cheerfulness. Out of love for him, display the joy of the just, even in doing external works. Give evidence of that modesty which is surely the fruit of an internal purity of soul: *Gaudete in Domino semper; modestia vestra nota sit omnibus hominibus.*¹³⁰

FIFTH LETTER

5. In the Mystical Cell of the Heart of Christ

1831

Hail to the Most Precious Blood of Jesus Christ

Letter of Encouragement for the Holy Exercise of the Rule of the year 1831

*Introduxit me Rex in cellam vinariam, ordinavit in me charitatem.*¹³¹

On the occasion of this holy retreat, let us retire into the Sacred Heart of Jesus which is the Center of peace, the Furnace of love, the Ark of safety, and the mystical banquet hall. Our purpose will be to raise our souls to that height of virtue and sanctity through which we became dear to God and accepted by the people - *Dilectus Deo, et hominibus.*¹³² The urgent need that we have of profiting spiritually from the good that is to be done, the twofold spirit that we must

¹³⁰ I want you to be happy in the Lord; I repeat, what I want is your happiness. Let your tolerance be evident to everyone. Ph 4:4-5

¹³¹ The king has taken me to his banquet hall, and the banner he raises over me is love. Sg 2:4

¹³² Beloved by God and men. Sir 45:1

acquire in effecting our own renewal as well as that of others, the particular and general needs of the Church - all of these furnish us with special incentives to benefit from the Word of God during these days. *Introduxit me Rex.*¹³³

I. Christ calls us to communion with him

If is the peace-loving and meek King, Christ Jesus, who brings us into that banquet hall to accomplish in us wonderful and surprising things. He assumes the title of king to signify the magnificence of his gifts, the extent of his infinite power and, at the same time, wishes to show us his most tender love by which he leads us into this asylum of peace. He will make us rich in merit and virtue, if we only respond to his graces.

He uses the image of a banquet hall to remind us of the conduct that we should observe so that we might receive and cherish his heavenly favors by means of a most intimate recollection in prayer. So, ultimately, let us be guided in our approach in order that in his banquet hall the most loving Lord may serve us with substantial food and drink. His nourishment will renew our hearts and fortify our souls unto salutary works for life eternal.

II. We, as three traveling companions

Now, the soul may find itself in three states: the first is the state of lethargy, the second of dejection, and the third, a need for greater fervor and energy in laboring for God's glory. Take the example of three companions who are traveling toward a certain city. Let us imagine that one of them grows weak because of illness. The second, although in good health, finds himself exhausted because of the harshness of the journey. The third, though robust, feels the need of nourishment to sustain himself and keep the powers of his body active so that he can complete the trip that he has begun. According to each one's need, would it not be necessary to adapt the method of providing sustenance in these three cases?

My dear brothers, let us apply the example to ourselves. Let us examine it in a spirit of profound humility before the adorable throne of the mercy of Jesus Christ, which is the Cross. Let us withdraw into the banquet hall of his divine Heart, as was proposed at the beginning, and speak to the divine Redeemer in this manner. O Lord, observe the lethargy that spiritual infirmities have produced in our souls; we need a cure and we already know that you assured us through the Prophet that you are willing to heal our maladies. *Sanat omnes infirmitates tuas.*¹³⁴

III. The curative power of the wine and the bread

¹³³ The king brought me in. Song 2:4

¹³⁴ In curing all your diseases. Ps 103:3

The first thing that is needed is some of that mystical wine of repentance which takes away that lethargy and invigorates our souls anew. *Potassti nos vino compunctionis*.¹³⁵ As a result, in accordance with our need, once we are repentant and contrite of conscience, we find ourselves again on the road that leads to Paradise, and how too does it spur us with hope! There is also the urgent need that we feel for the heavenly bread and mystical wine of your holy and divine love. It offsets the defection into which we could so easily fall were it not for you, O Lord, who propitiously supply us with nourishment. It is that very same nourishment that produces cheerfulness and gives rise to courage to follow the road to the mountain of perfection. Therefore, the Psalmist said: *Panis cor hominis confirmet ... et vinum laetificet cor hominis*.¹³⁶ Yet the nearer we get to our beloved home, heaven, the more necessary it is to grow strong in merit and rich in works before God. It is on this account that the dear Lord preserves for us special drinks of the choicest wines, such as those mentioned in the Canticle. *Botrus Cypri Dilectus meus*.¹³⁷ Intemperance in drink is forbidden, but in the spiritual order, blessed is he who is inebriated with the celestial and holy love, symbolized by the choicest wines of the vineyards of Engedi.

IV. Cultivate and guard the mystical vineyard

These wines, however, require the soul to cultivate the mystical vineyard of the heart and, moreover, to cultivate only such vines therein which will yield them. The divine Husbandman is Jesus. It is left to us to allow him to nourish us, while we cooperate with the designs of divine Providence. Then, indeed, will there be verified in each and every one of us, the words: *Vineae florentes dederunt odorem*.¹³⁸ Attracted by this fragrance, the people shall come to receive suitable nourishment. For this reason, it is also necessary to keep the protective hedge well-trimmed so that, while helping others, our mystical vineyard is not trampled under foot and its produce destroyed.

V. The wine press of the Cross

The wine cellar is fitted with a wine press to squeeze out the juice of the grapes in order to obtain from them those precious wines which we have been speaking of until now. Indeed, using the wine cellar as a type, was not the Heart of Jesus put under the wine press of a most

¹³⁵ You have allowed your people to suffer, to drink a wine that makes us reel. Ps 60:5

¹³⁶ Wine to make them cheerful, oil to make them happy and bread to make them strong. Ps 104:15

¹³⁷ My beloved is a cluster of henna flowers among the vines of Engedi. Song 1:15

¹³⁸ The blossoming vines give out their fragrance. Song 2:13

cruel suffering? And, does not all the profit which comes from his sufferings - to make an application from our comparison - flow from that source into our souls? *Torcular calcari solus, et de gentibus non est vir mecum.*¹³⁹ My beloved in Jesus Christ, it is time for us to submit the vineyard of our souls to cultivation, to toil willingly under the pressure of present trials. The love of Jesus, represented by the wine, will take away our lethargy, will provide against our dejection, and will give us strength and comfort for the journey to our dear home in heaven, where we shall rejoice triumphantly without end. Let these sentiments be impressed upon the minds and hearts of each one of us. Let the image of the wine cellar remind us to fulfill our obligations by corresponding to a God most lavish with his gifts. With our thoughts concentrated on a most accurate examination of ourselves, may he animate us toward the cure of our spiritual maladies. May he help us aim at the sublimest degrees of sanctity. Since the King of Glory has brought us into this banquet hall, let us establish here our own peaceful abode in time. Also, let us re-enforce the foundations of the holy city of God with the bonds of charity. Let us remember that the nuptial bed of the peace-loving King is the Cross, and, that our souls upon this nuptial bed yearn for the most tender embraces of affection toward Jesus. He has redeemed us through love, has shed all his Blood in love, and through him we have a mystical dwelling in his heart. *Introduxit me Rex in cellam vinariam, ordinavit in me charitatem.*¹⁴⁰

*Blessing and thanksgiving be evermore to Jesus,
Who with his Blood has saved us.*

Camillo Rossi, Missionary, Pro-Secretary General

SIXTH LETTER

6. Points to be examined in order to grow in fervor

1832

Letter of Encouragement for the Exercises of the Rule of 1832

May the grace and love of our Lord Jesus Christ be ever with us. Amen.

Venerable brothers, already the time of the holy spiritual retreat is at hand to which the

¹³⁹ I have trodden the winepress alone. Of the men of my people not one was with me. Is 63:3

¹⁴⁰ The king has taken me to his banquet hall, and the banner he raises over me is love. Song 2:4

most benign God deigns to call us again this year. *Tempus visitatione advenit.*¹⁴¹ and surely each one of us will repeat these words with sentiments of gratitude: *Ecce elongavi fugiens et mansi in solitudine.*¹⁴² We should, moreover, place before ourselves, during the meditations of these particularly acceptable days, other matter. Let us first review some points briefly

I. We are the instrument of the glory of God

The first duty to which the Almighty calls us is to contemplate his immense goodness in having chosen us as instruments of his glory and having raised us to the heavenly and divine ministry. The Apostle says to each one of us. *Admoneo te, ut resuscites gratiam, quae data est tibi per impositionem manuum presbyterii.*¹⁴³ *Exhibeamus nosmetipsos sicut Dei ministros*¹⁴⁴ ... *Vocavit (enim) nos in vocatione sua.*¹⁴⁵ From this we see how noble and dignified our way of life must be, mindful of what the Prophet says, namely, that the mystical mountain of holiness constitutes the basis upon which Sion the beloved rests: *Fundamenta ejus in montibus sanctis.*¹⁴⁶ These mountains are the apostolic men through whom souls are led to higher sanctity and, consequently, to the mystical doors of Sion. Eternal salvation, therefore, is closely bound up with the holiness of our ministry. *Diligit Dominus portas Sion.*¹⁴⁷ This mystic city, then, about which grand things are predicted, is the soul of a priest devoted to the care of others. *Gloriosa dicta sunt de te, Civitas Dei.*¹⁴⁸ *Non potes civitas abscondi supra montem posita.*¹⁴⁹ In this city, the just have their spiritual abode and with spiritual joy each one longs to profit from the great benefits which God offers. *Sicut laetantium omnium habitatio est in te.*¹⁵⁰ What a great incentive

¹⁴¹ The time of visitation has arrived. Cf. Lk 19:44

¹⁴² How far I would take my flight, and make a new home in the desert. Ps 55:8

¹⁴³ That is why I am reminding you now to fan into a flame the gift that God gave you when I laid my hands on you. 2 Tm 1:6

¹⁴⁴ We prove we are servants of God. 2 Cor 6:4

¹⁴⁵ Who has saved us and called us to be holy. 2Tm 1:9

¹⁴⁶ Yahweh loves his city founded on the holy mountain. Ps 87:1

¹⁴⁷ He prefers the gates of Zion. Ps 87:2

¹⁴⁸ He has glorious predictions to make of you, city of God. Ps 87:3

¹⁴⁹ A city built on a hill-top cannot be hidden. Mt 5:14

¹⁵⁰ And there will be princes dancing there. All find their home in you. Ps 87:7

this is for our constant and serious consideration!

II. Set up a blockage against the torrents of vice

A second reflection which must engage us during our silence and recollection are the needs of this most disastrous time in which we are living. Ungrateful beyond comparison and possessed of an extremely hardened heart is the person who does not feel and perceive the obligation of serving the honor and glory of Jesus Christ. It is shocking to witness how the divine Majesty is daily belittled by people, how his law is being trampled under foot, the holy name of the Lord profaned, and how the inestimable price of our redemption is disregarded. How consummate is the darkness which fills human minds in consequence of the sins of people! How they vent their anger against the sanctuary and seek to overthrow good order, destroying that peace which can be found only in God! We, who must construct a rampart against a torrent of vice and be a wall of defense for the house of the Lord - how necessary it is that we exclaim with the Prophet: *Spiritu principali confirma me.*¹⁵¹ But where is this twofold spirit principally to be acquired if not in the silent withdrawal of this spiritual retreat?

III. Humility: terrifying to the devil

Since the Lord makes use of humble souls for the grand works of his glory, and in order to come into special communion with God, let us this year resolve upon an ever more perfect acquisition of the virtue of humility. May this virtue be the governor of our thoughts, affection, words and deeds that we may again find favor in the eyes of God. Did not the Savior once say to the apostles?: *Mitto vos sicut agnos in medio luporum?*¹⁵² Did he not humble himself for the love of all, even to death on a cross? *Humiliavit semetipsum factus obediens usque ad mortem, mortem autem Crucis.*¹⁵³ As the humble shepherd Moses made himself dreaded in Egypt by moans of the miraculous rod, the practice of humility will make the evangelical worker, who is furnished with the mystic rod of the Cross, terrifying to the demon because of the virtue of humility. Therefore, the wellspring of all holiness is a humble life. From it flow fraternal charity, docility in obedience and, above all, assiduous prayer before the throne of divine Majesty. Through it we obtain greater graces, courage and strength for the ministry.

IV. The time is short

¹⁵¹ Keep my spirit steady and willing. Ps 51:12

¹⁵² I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Lk 10:3

¹⁵³ He was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross. Phil 2:8

Let this thought, then, be an incentive to work more energetically. Let it be our salutary intention during this life, the end of which is drawing ever nearer. *Non sunt condigne, therefore, passiones hujus temporis ad futuram gloriam, quae revelabitur in nobis.*¹⁵⁴ Also, *Quod in presenti est momentaneum et leve tribulationis nostrae, supremum in sublimitate aeternae gloriae pondus operatur in nobis.*"¹⁵⁵ Let also the thought that we are attached to a Society which offers such broad opportunity for laying up treasures in heaven during the short span of our lives, animate us to run the apostolic course with bold and swift steps. *Dies pleni inveniantur in nobis.*¹⁵⁶ Our days will then be rendered full of virtue and merit.

To this we shall add a special reflection for our seminarians. In the main, they must practice those things which relate to the priesthood so that their growth in spiritual fervor may keep pace with their advance in years, their application to the fields of knowledge and the desire to work for the glory of God and the edification of their neighbor. Let them consider the following analogy. Just as soldiers are intent upon furnishing themselves with weapons and ammunition for battle and can be said to be engaged in the service of their prince, so it is likewise with the one who is preparing himself for the service of the Church. He, too, is training himself in the handling of weapons necessary to fight the battles of the Lord. With the Prophet we shall say. *Docens manus ad proelium, posuit ut arcum aereum brachia mea.*¹⁵⁷

A reminder also to you, Brothers, who cooperate in the work of our Society when missions and retreats are being conducted. We recommend that you imitate the angels who praise and bless God and, at the same time, act as custodians of the divine will in behalf of the human race. What do I mean in saying this? How are you to imitate them? It means this: that you learn how to unite the active life with the life of contemplation. Always walk in the presence of God and yearn for God: immerse yourselves in him as in an ocean of everything good. Speak to him in daily and frequent prayer. When you are serving the Society, remember that you are serving God himself. My dearly beloved, be angels in your conduct, be angels in the love of God, be zealous for his honor. Know that just as an angel was placed by God in custody over the earthly paradise, so too does our venerable Society greatly depend upon you for the safekeeping of our houses which are havens of peace, places of special sanctification and quiet asylums for so many who are then able to hear the voice of God in serene retirement. For this reason, the

¹⁵⁴ I think that what we suffer in this life can never be compared to the glory as yet unrevealed. Rm 8:18

¹⁵⁵ The troubles which are soon over, though they weigh little, train us for the carrying of a weight of eternal glory which is out of all proportion to them. 2Co 4:17

¹⁵⁶ [Sal 72 (73):10]

¹⁵⁷ This God ... who trains my hands for battle, my arms to bend a bow of bronze. 2 Sam 22:35

observance of the Rule, the maintenance of silence, and the good example to be given, all form a part of your work of protection and custody.

Finally, let us all be united one to the other *in vinculo pacis*¹⁵⁸ and *in charitate Dei et in patientia Christi*.¹⁵⁹ in the adorable Heart of Jesus Christ. There, ponder the words of the Apostle: *Christus delixit nos et lavit nos in Sanguine suo*.¹⁶⁰ Let us implore an increase of fervor in the devotion to the divine Blood, the price of our redemption, the medicine and lever of our souls, the comfort and balm of our hearts. Amen.

Rome, 10 November 1832

By the Director General
Giovanni Merlini, Secretary General

SEVENTH LETTER

7. The mystical mountain of perfection

1833

Encouragement for the Exercises of the year 1833

*Erunt in montibus quasi columbae convallium*¹⁶¹

Since we are called by God to the mystical mountain of perfection which is proper to our state, our priesthood and our relationship with souls redeemed by the inestimable price of the divine Blood, it will be profitable to reflect, during this retreat, on the words quoted above. *Erunt*

¹⁵⁸ By the peace that binds you together Eph 4:3

¹⁵⁹ The love of God and the fortitude of Christ. 2 Thes 3:5

¹⁶⁰ Christ loved us and washed us in his blood. Rev 1:5

¹⁶¹ They are in the mountains like doves of the valleys. Ez 7:16

in montibus quasi columbae convallium ¹⁶²

I. The purgative way

My dearly beloved, God surely wills that our conscience and our life present that innocence which the image of the dove offers us for consideration. Do we appear so in the eyes of the Almighty? Let us count the years of our life, the blessings we have received from the Lord, the good works we have promised and how we have carried them out. Let us see how urgent it is to cleanse our hearts, keeping in mind the necessity to *lavamini, mundi estote*.¹⁶³ Remembering also that nothing unclean shall enter heaven, to what spotlessness must we not aspire? *Ecce nunc tempus acceptabile; ecce nunc dies salutis*.¹⁶⁴

With this truth firmly set in our minds, let us spend some time, especially during these first days of retreat, in considering what writers on asceticism state with regard to the purgative way. The dove, indeed, coos more than the songbird sings. Truly precious is what Cardinal Bellarmine wrote in his work entitled *De gemitu columbae*. Yes, dear brothers, let us bewail our faults, our failings. *Gemitus meus a te non est absconditus*.¹⁶⁵ *Exitus aquarum deduxerunt oculi mei*.¹⁶⁶ *Rugiebam a gemitu cordis mei*.¹⁶⁷ Let us weep for the needs of our times and the sins of the people. *Inter vestibulum, et altare plorabunt sacerdotes, ministri Dei et dicent: parce Domine, parce populo tuo*.¹⁶⁸ Lastly, let us lament with feelings of love for Jesus who says to us: *Aspicient ad me, et plangent*.¹⁶⁹ Those tears will not produce excessive sadness, but rather will moisten the heart with that holy unction which animates and directs the works that lead to eternal life.

The white dove is timid and watchful. When the hawk pursues It, it plunges into water. Similarly, the truly contrite soul during this holy retreat will adopt for itself that new manner of

¹⁶² They are in the mountains like doves of the valleys. Ez 7:16

¹⁶³ Wash, make yourselves clean. Is 1:16

¹⁶⁴ Now is the favorable time: this is the day of salvation. 2 Cor 6:2

¹⁶⁵ My sighing is no secret from you; Ps 38:10

¹⁶⁶ My eyes stream with tears. Ps 119:136

¹⁶⁷ My heart groans. I moan aloud. Ps 38:9

¹⁶⁸ Between vestibule and altar let the priests, the ministers of Yahweh, lament. Let them say, 'Spare your people, Yahweh!' Jl 2:17

¹⁶⁹ They will look on the one whom they have pierced, they will mourn. Zec 12:10

life in which alertness and watchfulness are maintained. At the same time, the fear of God will make it ready to flee every occasion of relapsing into sin. It will imitate Noah's white dove, and in the mystical ark of the divine Heart, it will seek that serene mansion which contains a foretaste of Paradise from within. In that way, when the devil, like the cruel hawk, lies in wait, it will plunge itself courageously into the waters that flow from the fountain opened by the wounds of Christ. By coming in contact with those mystical waters of eternal life, it again will find comfort and peace, while gathering new strength to conquer and rout the common tempter.

II. The illuminative way

To make the means proportionate to the end, therefore, the soul must place before itself the marvelous doctrine regarding the illuminative way. As the dove is without gall, so the soul strives to imitate it by constant mortification of the passions, typified by the gall even in the smallest matters, the soul endeavors to be directed in such a way that makes humility, patience, meekness, love and all the other holy virtues habitual. In that way it acquires the fruits that are worthy of being offered to the heavenly Husbandman. *Veniat Dilectus meus, comedat fructus pomorum suorum.*¹⁷⁰ As the eyes of the dove are open and clear, so also will our intellectual vision of God and of heavenly things become open and clear. With a pure intention we shall seek nothing but his glory and true good of souls. *Si oculus tuus simplex fuerit, totum corpus lucidum erit.*¹⁷¹ It is then that the Lord, transported in love and joy, exclaims: *Oculi tui alumbarum;*¹⁷² *ipse me avolare fecerunt.*¹⁷³

III The unitative way

Dear brothers, these very reflections - these truths - enable us to draw abundant fruit from our retreat and to acquire thoroughly the science of the saints, the focal point of our hearts' desire. The virtue that is acquired, then, becomes most pleasing to our hearts. Whoever looks forward to becoming virtuous, is disgusted with whatever leads away from God. He thirsts only after God, for in the unitive way he will be continually filled with desire and ever thirsting for God himself. Just as doves are regularly seen along *super rivulos aquarum,*¹⁷⁴ so let our life's

¹⁷⁰ Let my Beloved come into his garden, let him taste its rarest fruits. Song 4:16

¹⁷¹ It follows that if your eye is sound, your whole body will be filled with light. Mt 6:22

¹⁷² Your eyes - are doves: Song 4:1

¹⁷³ For they hold me captive. Song 6:4

¹⁷⁴ A pool of water. Sg 5:12

sojourn be near the fountains of eternal life. As the hart follows the course of his favorite brook to quench his thirst, so too let us thirst after our dear Lord. *Quemamodum desiderat cervus ad fontes aquarum, ita desiderat anima mea ad te, Deus.*¹⁷⁵ It is the Lord who says to us: *Sitientes venite ad aquas.*¹⁷⁶ Whoever drinks of these waters *sitiet adhuc.*¹⁷⁷ On the other hand, the dove also spreads out its wings in flight *pennae columbae.*¹⁷⁸ So we too, by advancing in virtue and the desire for perfection, should seek to fly to the throne of the Lord. This refers to the perfection which we must acquire by degrees; but, *quis dabit mihi pennas?*¹⁷⁹ God answers: Imitate the dove, and let your brilliantly glistening wings open in flight: *pennae columbae deargentatae, posteriora dorsi ejus in pallore auri.*¹⁸⁰ Such is the sweet yoke of the priesthood! What a mine of gold it makes available to us to amass our riches in heaven! These are the victories that holiness effects as a consequence of living on the mystical mountains of the sanctuary, as we imitate the qualities of the dove: *Erunt in montibus quasi columbae convallium.*¹⁸¹

IV. Humility

Finally, let humility be not only the basis and support of every good work and holy affection, but let it also be the custodian of the merits which are acquired through divine grace. Let it be our guide, our counselor, our teacher. May it lead us to the knowledge of our duties and of our failings. May it lead us by the hand to the fulfillment of all that God asks of us. Let humility comfort charity. Let it lead to the union of hearts in the adorable heart of Jesus Christ and make us one day the partakers of his most blessed kingdom in heaven. Amen.

*Erunt in montibus quasi columbae convallium.*¹⁸²

¹⁷⁵ As the doe longs for running streams, so longs my soul for you, my God. Ps 42:2

¹⁷⁶ Oh, come to the water all you who are thirsty. Is 55:1

¹⁷⁷ Will be thirsty again. Jn 4:13

¹⁷⁸ The wings of the dove. Ps 68:14

¹⁷⁹ Who will give me wings? Cf. Ps 55:7

¹⁸⁰ Imitate the dove, there were dove wings covered with silver, on their pinions the sheen of green gold." Ps 68:14

¹⁸¹ They are in the mountains like doves of the valleys. Ez 7:16

¹⁸² They are in the mountains like doves of the valleys. Ez 7:16

EIGHTH LETTER

8. Our road to sanctity

1834

Encouragement for the Spiritual Exercises for the year 1834

To prepare you for the spiritual exercises this year, I am pleased, my venerable and dear brothers in Jesus Christ, to use those memorable words which we repeat so often during the course of the liturgical year. They will awaken us from any laxity into which we might have fallen and, with the grace of God and our own good will, lead us to whole-hearted and fervent resolutions. These are the thoughts which God places before us. *Sancti tui Domine mirabilie consecuti sunt iter servientes praeceptis tuis, ut invenirentur illaesi in aquis validis.*¹⁸³ Let us, therefore, meditate on these words.

I. Those called to sanctity

We are called to sanctity. *Haec est enim voluntas Dei, sanctificatio vestra.*¹⁸⁴ It is the sanctity willed by God, inculcated by the Church, and expected by the people. It is that sanctity which begets order, reforms the individual and brings that person to a desire for the accomplishment of good works, focusing every effort on true and lasting happiness in God. For what other purpose are we in this valley of tears, if not to shine as the light and prepare ourselves in this way for our cherished home in heaven?

Not only is the delineation of general principles impressed upon our minds, as we briefly allude to them here, but also the concept of those particular reflections which have a special bearing on our state of life. Not merely through a common life of virtue, but through a marvelous

¹⁸³ Your saints, O Lord, have walked along a wonderful way, fulfilling your commandments, that they might be found unhurt in the midst of the mighty waters. Brev. Rom. Com. Martyr. II Noct., 4 Resp.

¹⁸⁴ What God wants is for you all to be holy. 1 Th 4:3

way does God himself deign to lead our souls: *Mirabile consecuti sumus iter*,¹⁸⁵ that is, the way of separation from the family and from any object that might stand as a hindrance, not to mention spiritual death to ourselves, so that we might fulfill your commandments. *Servientes praecitis tuis*.¹⁸⁶ Are not these same commandments, splendid proof of God's adorable providence towards us? Did he not promise us a hundredfold and the possession of life eternal? *Si quis reliquerit domum vel fratres, aut sorores, aut patrem, aut matrem, propter nomen meum, centuplum accipiet, et vitam aeternam possidebit*.¹⁸⁷ *They have walked along a wonderful way*. Blessed is that person who keeps this well in mind and lives only for God. Thereby the meaning of the words, *Sancti tui Domine*.¹⁸⁸ Herein, then, lies the matter for our self-examination during the days of the retreat the exercise of a very profound humility, of sincerest gratitude, or magnanimous courage to acknowledge the time spent in listlessness, tepidity and faintheartedness; likewise, of mustering new strength not only to walk, but to run the course pointed out to us by the Lord. In this way, we can free ourselves from the sway of anything that is detrimental to our souls.

II. The Blood of Christ: our specific road to sanctity

My dear brothers, only one glance at Jesus is needed. With the staff of the Cross, he has opened for us a path through this pitiable sea of the world. In that path we are free and safe from any flood or storm - *Ut inveniremur illaesi aquis validis*.¹⁸⁹ As the Lord never fails to support every creature in its needs, so he offers us the Red Sea, a symbol and type of the mysteries of his Precious Blood. It is in that Blood that we find provisions for our welfare. The mystical soil of souls, arid because of sin, is cultivated and watered. A way is prepared for the sinner by which he may go out of Egypt, image of this wicked and desert-like world. To the penitent person, as well as to those souls burning with love for Jesus, he glues a spur, an incentive even to become shipwrecked. In that mystic sea, thus spelling out another victory for the bountiful and divine

¹⁸⁵ Along a wonderful way. Brev. Rom. Com. Martyr. II Noct., 4 Resp.

¹⁸⁶ That they may be found unhurt. Brev. Rom. Com. Martyr. II Noct., 4 Resp.

¹⁸⁷ And everyone who has left houses, brothers, sisters, father. mother. children or land for the sake of my name will be repaid a hundred times over, and also inherit eternal life. Mt 19:29

¹⁸⁸ Your saints, O Lord. Brev. Rom. Com. Martyr. II Noct., 4 Resp.

¹⁸⁹ That they might be found unhurt in the midst of the mighty waters. Brev. Rom. Com. Martyr. II Noct., 4 Resp.

Redeemer of all. *Terra apparuit arida, et in mari rubro via sine impedimento.*¹⁹⁰ How many truths are contained in these few words! Jesus the Savior ardently desires to remind us to be recollected during the retreat and to read the great book of the Cross that we may acquire heavenly wisdom for the sanctification of ourselves and others. But, my dearly beloved, what do we read in the wounds of Jesus Crucified if not this, that Christ is the mystic rock struck with the staff of the Cross. *Quoniam percussit petram, et fluxerunt aquae, et torrentes inundaverunt.*¹⁹¹

Through the Cross we enjoy the abundance of those mystic waters, which symbolize the graces issuing from the merits of the divine Blood so as to be able to promote purity of life in ourselves and in our neighbor. Let us, then, listen to the convincing voice of the Savior who shows us his sufferings as an incentive to be zealous for souls, for they have been purchased at an inestimable price. *Empti enim estis pretio magno.*¹⁹²

The apostolic labors, the perseverance in the duties of the priesthood, the suffering in defense of the work of salvation, rather than depress should stimulate us to imitate our divine Master and Exemplar. In this manner *mirabile consecuti sumus iter.*¹⁹³ In us there will be verified the meaning of the words: *Si coram hominibus tormenta passi sunt, spes electorum est immortalis in aeternum.*¹⁹⁴ What a sweet consolation to be able to spend our life as a worthy sacrifice for the greater honor of God and the welfare of souls! What an interesting, what a glorious career the Almighty offers to us! And, what laurels, what crowns as a reward! *Ideo coronas triumphales meruerunt.*¹⁹⁵

III. Reviving our vocation

For this end, let us pray. Growing stronger in brotherly love, let us endeavor to understand more and more the purpose for which God has united us together in our community houses, namely, to be a mutual help in attaining the spirit of fervor and knowledge, in doing the work of the priesthood, in wielding the mystic armaments of the spirit, and no less in acquiring the means conducive to the attainment of our goal. *Propter testamentum Domini, et leges paternas Sancti Dei perstiterunt in amore fraternitatis, quia unus fuit semper spiritus in eis, et*

¹⁹⁰ Dry land appeared and out of the Red Sea, a way without impediment. Brev. Rom. Com. Martyr., II Noct., 4 Resp.

¹⁹¹ When he struck the rock, waters gushed, torrents streamed out. Ps 78:20

¹⁹² You have been bought at a great price. 1 Cor 6:20

¹⁹³ We have walked along the wonderful way. Cf. Brev. Rom. Com. Martyr. II Noct., 4 Resp.

¹⁹⁴ Though the elect be punished in the sight of men, yet is their hope full of immortality forever. Brev. Ro. Com. Martyr. I Noct., 3 Ant. Cf. Wis 3:4

¹⁹⁵ Therefore they have earned crowns of victory. Brev. Rom., Com. Martyr. I Noct., 2 Resp.

una fides.¹⁹⁶ Blessed, then, are they who, according to their calling, dwell in the house of the Lord, either by preparing themselves for the ministry, as our seminarians, or by doing actual ministerial work, or by participating in these respective occupations as do the lay Brothers. I say: *Beati qui habitant in domo tua, Domine, in saecula saeculorum laudabunt te*.¹⁹⁷

In conclusion, it is something holy and delightful to live united in charity for the reasons just stated: *Ecce quam bonum et quam jucundum habitare fratres in unum*.¹⁹⁸ It is *good* because it helps us toward sanctification; it is *delightful* because it redounds to the glory of the ministry. Therefore, let there be oneness in spirit and harmony of will in all things, so that, founded firmly on the mystic rock of the Cross, we may repel the darts which hell constantly aims at us. Let us fashion a noble crown for the beloved Sion. Amen.

NINTH LETTER

9. Who is a Missionary?¹⁹⁹

1835

Circular Letter for the Exercises of the year 1835

Hail to the Most Precious Blood of Jesus Christ

¹⁹⁶ Because of the covenant of the Lord, and the laws of their fathers, the saints of God abode in brotherly love, for one spirit and one faith was ever in them. Brev. Rom., Com. Martyr., III Noct., 7 Resp.

¹⁹⁷ Happy those who live in your house and can praise you all day long. Ps 84:5

¹⁹⁸ How good, how delightful it is for all to live together like brothers. Ps 133:1

¹⁹⁹ The text of this Circular Letter to the Missionaries, Students and Brothers is in the Archives of the House of Nepi, where we find the copy of the letter in the handwriting of Father Camillo Rossi. It is also found in the General Archives together with the other writings of the Founder, with the signature of Father Giovanni Merlini.

May the grace and the love of Jesus Christ be ever in our hearts. Amen.

[To the MISSIONARY]

*Attende tibi*²⁰⁰ ... *attende lectioni, exhortationi, et doctrinae.*
*Noli negligere gratiam, quae est in te, quae data est tibi.*²⁰¹

Dearly beloved, these are the memorable words with which God calls us to the spiritual exercises this year. Even though, with the grace of God, we constantly apply these words to the aim and object of our priestly work, nevertheless we must make use of these days to refresh our spiritual forces so as to be able to persevere in good works and with greater fervor promote the glory of God.

I. Build up the strength of the spirit

It cannot be denied that the exterior life, to be regulated and maintained, requires the cultivation of the interior life. The resulting zeal and fire of charity for the welfare of souls will be in proportion to the effort that we expend in submerging ourselves in that work of renewal. Therefore, the Apostle urges everyone: *Attende tibi ... hoc enim faciens, et teipsum salvum facies, et alios.*²⁰² What would happen to us, if while dispensing the mysteries of our holy religion to others, we would not make due and continuous application of them to ourselves? What would so much good avail us - that good which the apostolate offers and to which God has deigned to call us - if our apostolate is not animated and directed by a true spirit of God?

May the following words never be justly applied to any one of us. *Tota nocte laborantes nihil cepimus.*²⁰³ The years are passing and fleeting time, which will never return, is drawing us to endless eternity. Let each one, therefore say to himself. *Quid tu sapore deprimeris? Surge, invoca Deum tuum.*²⁰⁴ *Medice cura te ipsum.*²⁰⁵

²⁰⁰ Take care of yourself. 1Tm 4:16

²⁰¹ Make use of the time ... by reading to the people, preaching and teaching. You have in you a spiritual gift ... do not let it lie unused. Tm 4:13-16

²⁰² Take great care about what you do and what you teach; in this way you will save both yourself and those who listen to you. 1 Tm 4:16

²⁰³ We worked hard all night long and caught nothing. Lk 5:

²⁰⁴ What do you mean by sleeping? Get up! Call on your God. Jon 1:6

²⁰⁵ Physician, heal yourself. Lk 4:23

II. Who is a Missionary?

Who are the staunch and fearless workers of whom the Apostle speaks? They are those who act in a true spirit of the Lord and show themselves to be true ministers of the sanctuary *Exhibeamus nosmetipsos sicut Dei ministros*²⁰⁶ *Hi sunt vere filii Dei, qui spiritu Dei aguntur.*²⁰⁷

The older I become, said St. Vincent de Paul, the more I know what a missionary should be: he is a man sent by God *ad dandam scientiam salutis plebi ejus.*²⁰⁸ He is a visible angel sent to the people to bring divine messages. *Vidi Angelum Dei.*²⁰⁹ He is the mystic trumpet of the Lord calling those who have strayed to return to repentance. He encourages those already converted and leads the just to greater sanctity: *Exalta vocem tuam sicut tuba.*²¹⁰

What is a missionary? He is a man who, spiritually dead to everything which could hinder the purpose of the ministry and his holy vocation, lives in union with God and for his glory alone. *Mihi vivere Christus est.*²¹¹ He is a man who nourishes himself with no other food than with the heavenly food to which the sacred text refers. *Cibus meus est, ut faciam voluntatem Patris mei.*²¹² He thirsts after justice and sanctity: *Beati qui esurient, et sitiunt justitiam.*²¹³ His heart, animated by the heavenly fire of the love of God, is pierced and moved when he sees that men do not love God. *Quis infirmatur, et ego non infirmor, quis scandalizatur, et ego non uror?*²¹⁴

So, now, let us consider how we ought to examine ourselves in these days on the things that we have mentioned up to this point, so that we might renew within ourselves the fervor of that type of life which confirms what Jesus once said to his apostles: *Vos testimonium*

²⁰⁶ We prove we are God's servants. 2 Cor 6:4

²⁰⁷ Everyone moved by the Spirit is a son of God. Rom 8:14

²⁰⁸ To give his people knowledge of salvation. Lk 1:77

²⁰⁹ My Lord, you looked to me like an angel of God. Cf. Jds 6:22

²¹⁰ Raise your voice like a trumpet. Is 58:1

²¹¹ Life to me - is Christ. Phil 1:21

²¹² My food is to do the will of the one who sent me. Jn 4:34

²¹³ Happy those who hunger and thirst for what is right. Mt 5:6

²¹⁴ When any man has had scruples, I have had scruples with him; when any man is made to fall, I am tortured." 2 Cor 11:29

*perhibetis de me.*²¹⁵ ... *Virtute magna reddebant Apostoli testimonium Jesu Chrtisti.*²¹⁶ By this self-examination. we will come to realize better how our Society provides us with these means through which we are to advance toward a more and more vigorous life of virtue - withdrawal from the world, recollection, silence, examination of conscience, and all the other means enumerated in our “*Practices*”. These means, indeed, do develop a strengthening of the Spirit and the progress to be made in reaching perfection! *Justi habebunt fortitudinem, assument pennas ... volabunt et non deficient.*²¹⁷

This interior cultivation of the Spirit lays the foundation for the exterior life of the ministry. We are ordained to perform duties towards God, towards our Society, and towards our neighbor. In each one of us, the words of the Lord should be verified when he speaks of the just man who seeks always to advance and mature in holiness. *Ascensiones in corde suo disposuit in valle lacrymarum in loco quem posuit.*²¹⁸

III. As Mary: Listen so that you are listened to

May we diligently keep these few sentiments in our hearts and let them be deeply imprinted there. Let us imitate the Blessed Virgin Mary, who cherished the words of our blessed Savior, for she was *the very* mirror of sanctity. *Conservabat omnia verba conferens in corde suo.*²¹⁹ After Jesus, may our good Mother be our guide and teacher, our prototype and model. In a spirit of deep humility, let us listen to and cherish those teachings of God which are given in the sacred passages quoted above. May our hearts be filled with those holy desires which bring about a most intimate union with the highest Good. May he always direct our tongue in announcing the eternal truths to the people: *Eructavit cor meum verbum bonum.*²²⁰ ... *Domine labia mea aperies.*²²¹ May our lips, then, be closed for this reason. *Audiam quid loquatur in me Dominus Deus, quoniam loquetur pacem in plebem suam.*²²² Notice! First, I myself must listen, so that I,

²¹⁵ You will be my witnesses. Acts 1:8

²¹⁶ The apostles continued to testify - with great power. Acts 4:33

²¹⁷ They (the saints) shall renew their strength, they shall take wings as eagles, they shall fly and not faint. Brev. Rom., Com. Martyr., II Noct., 3 Ant.

²¹⁸ Thence they make their way from height to height, soon to be seen before God on Zion. Ps 84:6-7

²¹⁹ As for Mary, she treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart. Lk 2:19

²²⁰ My heart is stirred by a noble theme Ps 45:2

²²¹ And my mouth will speak out your praise. Ps 51:17

²²² I hear the things the Lord God is saying, for what he is saying means peace for his people. Ps 85:9

then, may be listened to by the people. With the grace of God and in accordance with each one's capacity, there will be realized both in me and in the others that very system of peace which establishes the kingdom of God firmly in our hearts. *Audiam quid loquatur in me Dominus Deus.*²²³

9. Prepare yourself for the ministry by imitating Jesus

1835

Reminder to the Young BOARDERS to be read by those who are our boarders

Already when the retreat was first announced, you heard the voice of God in your hearts. As you prepare for the priesthood, remember the great obligations you will receive. Prepare yourselves, therefore, by a serious consideration of sacred things. Acquire solid virtue so as to become the light of the world, and in the acquisition of the sacred sciences, that you may become the salt of the earth. Imitate Jesus in his private life. In this regard,; examine yourselves, especially during these days: *Vita Jesu manifestetur in nobis.*²²⁴

Consecrate the first fruits of your career to God, and, as long as you remain as lilies in the garden of the Church, the most loving Jesus will find in you his special consolation, and will always fill you more and more with rich blessings. You should ask for all these things with deep humility, particularly during this retreat. Accustom yourselves in a special manner to having a singular purity of intention in every action. And, in every work, put a high degree of charity so that you may become true children of light. *Ut filii lucis ambulate.*²²⁵ *Ambulate dum lucem habetis ne tenebrae vos comprehendant.*²²⁶

9. Rediscovery and the Verification of a vocation

²²³ I hear the things the Lord God is saying. Ps 85:9

²²⁴ So that the life of Jesus, too, may always be seen in our body. 2 Cor 4:10

²²⁵ Be like children of light. Eph 5:8

²²⁶ Walk while you have the light, or the dark will overtake you. Jn 12:35

To The BROTHERS

United as you are here during the retreat, my dear Brothers in Jesus Christ, remember those inspirations which the all-provident God gave you when he called you to be our help in the Society. Examine yourselves with respect to the cooperation you have given, to your practice of virtue and your response to the God-given means for your sanctification. Keep in mind that when you serve the Society you are helping in a work which is God's. The diligence and zeal that must be yours in fulfilling the obligations which the Lord has entrusted to you can then be easily understood. Do not blame others for your failings, but rather put the blame on your own lack of virtue. With the grace of God, you shall, however, acquire that virtue during this retreat. May the Lord *repleat in bonis desiderium vestrum*²²⁷ in order that just as you are holy in the course of time, so will you be triumphant in eternity. Amen.

9. Announcements

Remarks

1. The spirit of prayer and humility is to grow in all of us; while working, we should maintain union with God and should pray both for ourselves and for the souls that God entrusts to us.
2. Each one is to have a spiritual guide, not only nominally, but one who fits the principles given by our Albertini in his *Direttore Diretto*.
3. We are to develop a strong attachment for the Institute and pray for it; pray for an increase in its membership and for caution about losing our vocation through our own fault.
4. In all of our dealings, let charity be triumphant. During recreation periods, in particular, conversation should be focused on things that are edifying. Let us not be judgmental

²²⁷ Satisfy your desire with his blessings. Cf. Ps 103:5

about things that God does not entrust to us. Let us not become entangled in things that are not proper, especially for a man involved in the apostolate.

5. The first apostolate for us and for our Brothers-in-service is especially that of giving good example. Let us all be deeply moved by the maxim: "*Ama nesciri, et pro nihilo reputari ... Cum feceritis haec omnia, dicite: Servi inutiles sumus*".

6. Let obedience be the mystical ship that conveys us to a safe port; but let it be a blind, generous, suffering obedience. I say nothing about the zeal and industrious charity that should accompany the doing of any good work, nothing about the real thirst for the salvation of souls or about the repugnance that should be felt about things that are opposed to virtue. From a consideration of these things, we develop a serious attitude and at the same time a certain gentleness, an impartiality in our actions along with a feeling of contentment for all that God accomplishes through us, setting aside sentiments of complaint, ostentation and things of that nature.

7. May we all have a tender devotion to the Divine Blood and be alert to bring about a rapid spread of this devotion using the methods already set up. May most holy Mary, St. Francis Xavier and our Guardian Angel be the guides along the road that leads to heaven.

Concerning temporal things

As best as one is able, one should help the Institute. Attention should be paid to keeping postal expenses that arise from becoming excessive. Yet, to delay communication with the Directory General or be inattentive to other instances that relate truly and clearly to the glory of God, would be a failure. However, some useless letters that are meaningless and at times even harmful (here I excuse the intention) is another extreme that should be avoided. Thus, a just equilibrium is to be maintained. The letter communication should always be respectful, civil, edifying and never biting, irritating, or uncivil. Since the prices of faint commodities have been increased, each one of us is to adjust to the situation, and, except in urgent cases, to make an adaptation, for example, in the morning, eating breakfast. We should follow the example that well-regulated families follow in their homes, but, safeguarding as mentioned before, cases of urgent health conditions.

Concerning legacies and indulgences

We should not be careless about the exactness of legacies and also the Briefs of Indulgences, and renew them when necessary. Furthermore, since we do have Indulgences of the Divine Blood, it is necessary to see to it that new ones are not requested or the same ones repeated that we already have.

Observation

At the present time our General Archives, the things that have been printed by the Director General and other materials relating to the Institute are being put in order. Offer prayers for temporal means that are needed. Required, in the meantime, as a measure of security, is that an envelope be sent containing a listing of the funds in each Mission House, even though it is a small one. The various items are to be listed whether they are annuities, rents, etc. If there are copies of documents, they are to be systematically kept in the House's archives in according with the circular letter sent. A listing or an indication of liabilities should be included. A summary of its present status, plus or minus condition, up to the day that the envelope is sent is to be given.

A listing Likewise of the organizations that are functioning there and a resume of their more outstanding activities is to update the material in the General Archives, as well as any other material that would be included under this present reminder.

TENTH LETTER

10. Cultivate and Defend Our Vocation

1836

Hail to the Most Precious Blood of Jesus Christ

Encouragement for the Holy Exercises of the Rule
in November of the year 1836
To The MISSIONARIES

To follow the usual method of encouraging one another to a renewed fervor in virtue, we shall confine ourselves to a few short reflections which I suggest as a help to a more perfect growth in our holy vocation during these spiritual exercises to which God in his infinite goodness is calling us. My dear brothers, I do not deny that the spiritual thoughts that we shall briefly recall to mind now may have been presented on some former occasion. However, I am convinced in my mind that a closer and more intense examination of these rays of divine light will necessarily impress themselves more deeply upon us and make them more clearly

understood: *Declaratio sermonem tuorum illuminati; et intellectum dat parvulis.*²²⁸ The three points which must be made the primary objectives of our meditation this year are: first, a fuller understanding of the sublime vocation for which God has chosen us; second, the good use of the means which the mercy of God continually offers us for the attainment of our end; third, the obstacles which the evil spirit places in our way, which not only retard our spiritual progress, but likewise thwart our ministry in furthering the main objective of giving glory to God.

I. Our Vocation

In regard to the first point, we should like the time to consider the question which the Mellifluous Doctor proposed to each one of his monks. *Ad quid venisti?*²²⁹ Yes, let each one of us ponder these words and thus better inform ourselves of the purpose of our being in the Society. A true detachment from all things and all others, self-conquest and consequently the eradication of inordinate inclinations are, without doubt, prerequisites for accomplishing a well-regulated, disinterested and holy work entrusted to us by God. Every human attachment lessens our good work, alters its degree of merit, and is a great hindrance to perfection. Job said: *Verebar omnia opera mea.*²³⁰ St. John of the Cross, that great master of the spiritual life, illustrates this point by means of the following analogy: the hunter who uses just a very fine thread attached to a bird will readily hamper its flight through the air; in like manner, the attachments of the soul, no matter how insignificant the ties may be, inevitably retard its mystic flight to God. It is not sufficient, therefore, that I merely do something good, but I must likewise be actuated by that spirit of the Lord which animates, directs and raises that good work to the greater glory of God. *Hii sunt vere filii Dei, qui spiritu Dei aguntur.*²³¹ How blessed are we, if a prompt fulfillment of the divine Will serves as the mystical food to nourish and strengthen our souls. *Cibus meus est, ut faciam voluntatem Patris mei.*²³²

What, then, let me ask, is a missionary? He is one sent by the Lord *ad dandam scientiam salutis plebi ejus.*²³³ He is an extraordinary minister who offers new means, beyond those that are ordinary, for the sanctification of the people. Since such a sublime career demands an eminent

²²⁸ As your word unfolds, it gives light, and the simple understand. Ps 119:130

²²⁹ Why have you come here? St. Bernard.

²³⁰ Fear comes over me. Jb 9:28

²³¹ Everyone moved by the Spirit is a son of God. Rom 8:14

²³² My food is to do the will of the one who sent me. Jn 4:34

²³³ To give his people knowledge of salvation. Lk 1:77

degree of virtue, the laity expect and demand it from us. Since we are all aware that the ministry is branching out into so many various fields of operation, can anyone fail to understand that this very fact should also be a strong incentive to an irreproachable life? Profound humility, ardent charity, steady and indomitable patience amidst suffering, mystically alive through virtuous acts - these are the essential endowments and indispensable ornaments for our own salvation and that of others. *Ornatam monilibus filiam Jerusalem Dominus concupivit.* ²³⁴

We note that the soul consecrated to God is compared to a valiant woman, verified in the moral application of this text: *manum suam misit ad fortia, et digiti ejus apprehenderunt fusum.* ²³⁵ The hand is the instrument ready for work. So, a steady and painstaking fortitude in our work will make us acceptable to the heavenly Spouse who, out of love for us, advises us to weave a choice garment which, in other words, means that we are to delicately fashion the work of sanctity in ourselves and in others. Once this valiant woman had applied herself to the task of weaving with a thread of the choicest silk (an allusion to her various virtues) she was able to present that most precious garb, spoken of in the words: *Stragulatam vestem fecit sibi; byssus, et purpura indumentum ejus ... ridebit in die novissimo.* ²³⁶ It is no wonder, then, that she could be acclaimed with words of praise. *Beatisssimam praedicaverunt.* ²³⁷ My beloved in Christ, let us reflect deeply on these truths and imbibe their meaning, so as to renew in ourselves that spirit to which God is constantly calling us. Let us often repeat the words of the prophet: *Spiritum rectum innova in visceribus meis.* ²³⁸ And, in the remaining days of our pilgrimage here below, let us keep in continuous contact with the Lord so that *dies pleni inveniantur in nobis.* ²³⁹

II. The three means of cooperating with the designs of God

It will not suffice merely to lay open our minds and hearts to the purposes of divine Providence regarding us. We must likewise consider the most suitable means by which we ought to cooperate with almighty God's plans themselves.

I observe that there are three principal means which that valiant woman used with special

²³⁴ The Lord greatly desired the daughter of Jerusalem, adorned with her jewels. Brev. Rom., Co. Fest. BVM, R. VI

²³⁵ She sets her hands to the distaff, her fingers grasp the spindle. Prv 31:19

²³⁶ She is dressed in fine linen and purple ... She is clothed in strength and dignity, she can laugh at the days to come. Prv 31:22-35

²³⁷ Her sons stand up and proclaim her blessed, her husband, too, sings her praises. Prv 31:28

²³⁸ Keep my spirit steady and willing. Ps 51:12

²³⁹ Full days may be found in us. Ps 72:10 (Vulgate)

diligence that assured her of the acclaim referred to a short while ago. The first, her love of reserve; second, her constancy in prayer; third, untiring zeal for work. So, too, an apostolic worker, a soul consecrated to God, must be desirous of separation from the world. In doing so, he can maintain correspondence with the divine Master in a particular way so as to prepare himself for the external work of the ministry. A missionary must be a mystic in his own room, and a vigorous laborer in the field. Let him unite the interior life with the exterior and live in harmony with God. In other words, the interior life is the basis upon which the exterior life builds. Lack of interior life deprives the edifice of its foundation. If the foundation is not firm, the exterior edifice cannot be erected in keeping with the divine Will. Prayer, moreover, directs the construction of that edifice, it lends vigor to its design, it puts animation into its execution, and finally, sees to the selection of those ornaments which will lead the people to an admiration of the Lord's works. *Venite, et videte opera Domini.* ²⁴⁰

The souls entrusted to our care should be induced to make this spiritual edifice their mystical abode. With the help of God, they will then find a remedy if they are infirm, strength if they are weak, and courage if they are faint-hearted. For the redeemed, it will be their protection, their defense and their sanctification. However, there will not be lacking those who obstinately resist the divine Mercy. In order to overcome that resistance, we must have zeal, be tireless in work and unflinching in trials, always energetic in sacred functions, and becoming all things to all people to gain all for Christ. In reference to this, it is said of that valiant woman: *Gustavit, et vidit, quia bona est negotiatio ejus ... Os suum aperuit sapientiae ... Pamem ostiosa non comedit ... Roboravit brachium suum ... confidit in ea cor viri sui.* ²⁴¹ Therefore, happy are we, particularly during these days of closeness to Jesus our Master, if prompted by his love, we allow these sentiments to mature into firm resolutions.

III. Foresee and overcome the obstacles

Just as a soldier, who has been well drilled in training camp, will advance cautiously upon enemies in order to discover their ambush and eventually bring them under control and triumph over them - so also must we conduct ourselves in the apostolate which has been entrusted to us, being mindful of the words of the Apostle to his beloved disciple. *Labora sicut bonus miles Jesu Christi.* ²⁴²

In applying the means which I have just proposed - means that furnish us with those weapons of fight which we should constantly employ against the infernal host - we will not lack

²⁴⁰ Come, think of Yahweh's marvels, the astounding things he has done in the world. Ps 46:9

²⁴¹ She finds her labor well worth while ... she opens her mouth, she does so wisely ... no bread of idleness for her ... she shows how strong her arms can be, and consequently, her husband's heart has confidence in her. Cf. Prv 31: 10-28

²⁴² Put up with your share of difficulties like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. Tm 2:3

temptations of fear, reluctance, sloth or anger. They will disturb our spirit in order to blind us to the importance of the priesthood, to withhold from us whatever is conducive to its success, and to discourage us in the face of opposition. But let us be united in our endeavor to conquer the flatteries and deceptions of the tempter lest we *ne quando dicat inimicus meus: Praevalui*.²⁴³ Since the demon is incessantly bent upon defeating every good work, how many more efforts will he not make towards hindering the great work of our apostolate? On the other hand, let us always keep in mind. *Omnia possum in eo qui me confortat*.²⁴⁴ *Quis me separabit a charitate Christi?*²⁴⁵ With the well-fashioned mystic staff of divine grace, let us overcome the haughtiness of the enemy, just as the staff of Moses once humbled the pride of the Pharaoh. In grasping this staff, we find support, encouragement and assistance in our trials: *Virga tua, et baculus tuus; ipsa me consolata sunt*.²⁴⁶

Now that we have communicated and applied these important spiritual thoughts in the bond of charity toward each other, let us carry them out together with promptness. To use a scriptural phrase, may they serve as the mysterious seals which diligently close the doors of our hearts to the enemy of good works. May they bring us that peace of heart which constitutes a foretaste of Paradise. Thus, serving God with a prompt spirit, we most ardently desire to possess him for all eternity. Amen.

10. Obedience

1836

To the BOARDER [and BROTHERS]

²⁴³ Be struck with fear, fear without reason. Ps 13:5

²⁴⁴ There is nothing I cannot master with the help of the One who gives me strength. Phil 4:13

²⁴⁵ Nothing therefore can come between us and the love of Christ." Rom 8:35

²⁴⁶ Beside me your rod and your staff are there, to hearten me. Ps 23:4

On you, my dearest young men, God has impressed a special mark of his benevolence. You are the new plantings of the Society. With tender and religious affections, we look upon you as very precious. Upon you we center our tireless care and solicitude, so that as you advance in years, you may also progress in virtue and spiritual fervor. But what means shall you employ for accomplishing your goal? Holy obedience - that is the virtue on which you must examine yourselves: *Vir obediens loquetur victorias*.²⁴⁷ Obedience is that mystical beacon whose light points out the way of eternal salvation to you. It uncovers the snares of the enemy, gives you security in your work, sets your mind and heart at rest, and calls into practice the other virtues that crown us with merit for our heavenly fatherland. Lastly, it will make you true disciples of Jesus, the model of perfect obedience, *factus est obediens usque ad mortem*.²⁴⁸ Not at all by our own ideas, nor by vanity (which may easily infect us), nor by false principles (which could readily dominate us) - not by these should we regulate our lives and rule our passions, but by the true spirit of the Gospel and the exemplary conduct of the saints. These interior sentiments, prompted by religion, should be the mainstay of your deportment, of your good example, and of your preparation for the priesthood. Since they are equally useful for all, these admonitions can serve, in a special way, also for the Brothers. May the peace and love of Jesus Christ always be in our hearts. Amen.

May Jesus be blessed and thanked,
who has saved us by his Blood.

For Canon del Bufalo, Missionary Apostolic, Director General

Giovanni Merlini, Secretary General.

ELEVENTH LETTER

11. The Missionary Living in the Community

1837

Hail to the Most Precious Blood of Jesus Christ

²⁴⁷ The speech of the obedient one will be heard. Prv 21:28

²⁴⁸ Even to accepting death. Phil 2:8

Encouragement for the Holy Exercises of the Rule

in November of the year 12836

To the MISSIONARIES

Dearest brothers, in the past years God has given us most salutary truths as nourishment for our souls. He has provided us with the wholesome food of his heavenly and divine words so that we might walk in the way of holiness with strength. Let each one of us examine himself in the presence of God as to what has been our response to these divine favors. Once again that happy period has come during which we are called by our most loving God to look over the record book of our consciences. We must examine ourselves diligently and zealously on the use that we have made of the graces, the talents and the time which God has so far accorded us to lay up treasures for heaven. May it never happen that we become like the idle servant who buried his talent, like the steward wasteful of the goods of his lord, or the foolish virgins who carried empty lamps. Upon recalling those memorable words. *Ne sum aliis predicaverim, ipse reprobus efficiar.*²⁴⁹ What, then, should we who are so wretched in the sight of God, say? Each one of us might well exclaim with the prophet *Ego vir videns paupertatem meam.*²⁵⁰ May our holy mother the Church pray that fearless workers rise to meet the needs of the time and wage war against vice and sin with the mystic weapons of the ministry. Now, especially during the present retreat, God will teach us the use of those weapons: *Docet manus meas ad praelium.*²⁵¹ I suggest three things in particular for our consideration during these days.

I. Why are we in the Institute?

First, that we examine ourselves in the light of the question which the Mellifluous Doctor was accustomed to ask his monks: *Ad quid venisti?*²⁵² For what purpose are we in the Society? To cooperate with the great designs of divine Providence in the sanctification of ourselves and others; to be united in the bond of charity in order to set up a rampart against the sinfulness of the world, and to quench the thirst of Jesus for souls, to imitate more closely the life of Jesus Christ through detachment from home, parents, worldly comforts and, above all, from ourselves. How all of this contributes to our real benefit and to the glory of God! Therefore, I am not in the

²⁴⁹ Having been an announcer myself, I should not want to be disqualified. Cor 9:27

²⁵⁰ I am the man familiar with misery. Lam 3:1

²⁵¹ This God trains my hand for battle. 2 Sam 22:35

²⁵² Why have you come here? St. Bernard.

Society to work in accordance with my own opinions, or to cater to self love even in things spiritual, or to foster petty animosities, acting according to my own likes and dislikes. Rather, I am in the Society to look after the life of my soul, to offer myself for the glory of God with a holy abandonment in God himself, and to train myself in humility and obedience, all this with the purpose of knowing better his divine Will by being completely reliant upon him as I should.

II. Love for our Institute

The second point about which we must examine ourselves is the religious and pious love that we are to show towards our Society and towards one another. We should always act according to the spirit of the Lord. *Ii sunt vere filii Dei, qui spiritu Dei aguntur.*²⁵³ We should act in such a manner that we, too, might have stamped upon our hearts the saying of the great St. Francis Xavier. *Oblivioni detur dextera mea, si obliviscar tui, Societas Jesu.*²⁵⁴ In this matter, may our love be very, very special. Let it be generous and outgoing, patient and longsuffering, judicious and vigorous. Let us apply to ourselves those memorable words. *Si quis suorum, et maxime domesticorum curam non habet, fidem negavit, et est infideli deterior.*²⁵⁵ But, *qui sunt autem domestici Dei?* many interpreters (of the Scriptures) ask. They are those who are especially called to the sanctuary, to the convents, to a more intimate union with the Lord. Now who does not know that upon the cultivation of those mystic plants depends the abundance of the fruits they will yield? The heavenly Husbandman is pleased with them and expresses his delight. May God grant that in the case of our Society the words following may be verified: *Vinea florentes dederunt odorem suum.*²⁵⁶ The vineyard, however, has its protective hedge, so that the foxes may not stealthily creep in to destroy the vineyard. So, too, by way of comparison, does the Rule serve when it prescribes withdrawal from the world, silence, proper conduct with outsiders, prudence in our dealings, and virtuous industry in our activities. The cultivation of a vineyard requires skill, toil, vigilance and fruitful rain. Likewise, in the cultivation of our communities, we need special graces. These are obtained through prayer, through exerting ourselves in accomplishing good works, in being orderly and in being vigilant to gather the awaited fruit. In a marvelous way, our Prescriptions and our Rule, which cannot be too highly

²⁵³ Everyone moved by the Spirit is a son of God. Rom 8:14

²⁵⁴ May my right hand be forgotten if I should forget you, O Society of Jesus! Cf. Ps 136 (137):5.

²⁵⁵ Anyone who does not look after his own relatives, especially if they are living with him, has rejected the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. I Tm 5:8

Who are those of the house of God?

²⁵⁶ The blossoming vines give out their fragrance. Song 2:13

recommended, serve as our support.

III Promoting the glory of God in the Apostolate of the Institute

Finally, the third point for our meditation is our activity in furthering those objectives which lead towards the glory of the Lord. This we do in seeking to give them permanence through the commitments which our Society places before us, using the means that it designates as well as the practices which it encourages. Here, let the apostle St. Paul speak. In his letters he reveals a very profound ardor for the salvation of souls and their constant perfection. *Per Evangelium ego vos genui.*²⁵⁷ *Optabam anathema esse pro fratribus.*²⁵⁸ *Quis infirmatur, et ego non infirmor? ... Quis scandalizatur, et ego non uror?*²⁵⁹ *Charitas Christi urget nos.*²⁶⁰ *Superabundo gaudio in omni tribulatione.*²⁶¹

IV. The spiritual ideas for increasing our charity

My dear brothers, let us meditate on these citations, and, in order that the thoughts expressed in this letter of encouragement might have the fruitful results intended by God, let us set before ourselves a few spiritual reminders that can serve, so to speak, as the sparks of fire that will ignite the flames of charity:

1. External life, if not guided by and based upon the interior life, will exhaust the physical strength of a worker, but it will not make him irreproachable before God.

2. Whoever loves withdrawal from the world and a humble lowly life safeguards the practice of virtue and preserves holy and divine love. A man will not permit a precious liquid to evaporate, ascetic writers are wont to say, but will use all care to preserve it.

3. He stands close to evil who is content with the lesser good. He stands far from evil who always aspires to the greater good.

4. It is the greatest form of wretchedness to be rich in intellectual gifts, popular acclaim, outstanding oratory and so forth, if these are not associated with virtue and considered in their relationship to God.

²⁵⁷ I am enlivened by the Gospel. I Cor 4:15

²⁵⁸ I would willingly be condemned and be cut off from Christ if it could help my brothers. Rom 9:3

²⁵⁹ when any man has had scruples, I have had scruples with him, when any man is made to fall, I am tortured. 2 Cor 11:29

²⁶⁰ The love of Christ overwhelms us. 2 Cor 5:14

²⁶¹ In all our trouble I am filled with consolation and my joy is overflowing. 2 Cor 7:4

5. It is the language of the world to speak well of oneself, evil of others.

6. Whoever lives in obedience conforms to the will of God, maintains peace of heart and furthers the edification of his neighbors.

7. The efficacious means to obtain zeal in accomplishing all that we propose to do is devotion to the divine Blood. May it be the joy of our hearts.

11. The Exercise of Virtues

1837

To the BOARDERS

In the practice of virtue there are three different degrees. The first is that in which a person sometimes performs acts of virtue. The second is that in which he tries to exercise himself in such virtues on every occasion. The third is that in which he aims at perfection in them.

Let everyone examine himself in this regard.

11. Three helpful sayings

1837

To The BROTHERS

In order that a Brother might be a worthy member of the Society and fulfill his obligations well, let him remember these brief but significant words: *Speak little! Work hard!! Support all!*

These sentiments - although directed especially to the students and Brothers - are

profitable to every member of our Society. May the grace, the peace, and the mercy of Jesus Christ always abound in our hearts. Amen

6 November 1837

On behalf of *Can. del Bufalo*, Missionary Apostolic, Director General

Giovanni Merlini, Missionary, Secretary General