

22. LETTER TO FATHER CHARLES LAIRÉ

Charles Marie Lairé (1826-1851) went with Bishop Bessieux to the African mission in 1849. He died three years later at Great-Bassam, West Africa.

65

Holiness and sacrifice will save Africa. This holiness arises from humility and gentleness. Duties of a Superior.

Paris, May 8, 1851 Vol. 13, p. 142

Dear Confrere:

In your letter of March 7th which, like all your letters, gave me great pleasure, you state that you are ashamed of having waited so long to write me. If *you* have reasons for shame, *I* have a right to be likewise ashamed because of my own delay in writing to you. But we are both strong in making good resolutions: We will change our ways and will no longer have to blush.

[Holiness and Sacrifice Will Save Souls]

So you are now in Great-Bassam. You will find people there whose conversion, it seems, will take much time. Your principal preaching will consist of leading a holy life, for you must give a good example and thus attract the graces of the Divine Master on those poor souls who are so horribly enslaved to the devil.

The Africans do not need and will not be converted by the efforts of clever and capable missionaries. It is holiness and the sacrifice of their priests that will be the instrument of their salvation. They are still too much blinded by Satan . . . [to be saved by ordinary means]. They need to be redeemed

LETTER TO FATHER CHARLES LAIRÉ

by sufferings united to those of Jesus which can expiate their abominable sins. The missionaries must possess a holiness that draws down upon those souls the all-powerful and merciful merits of Jesus to wash away God's maledictions.

Be holy and urge your confreres to be holy. On this depends the salvation of those wretched souls for which you suffer and immolate yourself. All your sufferings and sacrifices will remain sterile if they are not sanctified by your entire conduct. It is not sufficient that you offer your sufferings to God alone or even that you offer your life for the salvation of souls. Such an offering will be useful for yourself and will obtain for you the remission of your own faults. But if God's mercy has to count upon and use all that is good in you to pay for the remission of your own sins, and if there is not enough good in you to pay for your own sins, how will your works and sacrifices be sufficient to redeem others?

Moreover, if we do not possess God's sanctity in all our conduct, if that holiness does not eliminate, remove, or at least keep under control, all our defects and imperfections, how can God hear the prayers which we send up for the souls He has asked us to save? How then will our sacrifices be fruitful for such a purpose? These very sacrifices would always be tainted by our natural habits, faults and imperfections; hence very little would remain to attract God's mercy.

How great is my wish that all my beloved confreres should feel as keenly as I do how urgent is the need of holiness for African missionaries! Be holy therefore as Jesus was holy. There is no other way to redeem and sanctify souls.

[Humility and Gentleness Sanctify Souls]

May the spirit of Jesus animate your actions; may He form all your sentiments and deaden and moderate the impetuosity

SPIRITUAL LETTERS OF FRANCIS LIBERMANN

of your mind and all your inclinations to be harsh and unyielding. In a word, may He control whatever is passionate and unruly in you, govern all your impressions, and direct all the movements of your soul. May Jesus grant you the gentleness and humility of which He has given you so perfect an example. How very important is humility and gentleness, and how few possess these dispositions! These precious virtues, which are the direct fruit of true and perfect love, demand a very high degree of interior abnegation and great docility and submission to God.

All inflexibility of will, all confidence in oneself and one's own ideas should disappear and be annihilated, if we want to possess those wonderful virtues.

A missionary who has those two virtues profoundly imbedded in his soul, who makes them permeate his interior habits and actions, is truly sanctified by the spirit of God. And he who lacks those great sanctifying virtues is a freak so far as Christ's apostolate is concerned, even when he is as zealous as Saint Paul or Saint Francis Xavier, for he then lacks the foundation: the spirit of Jesus cannot animate him and, most of the time, it is replaced by the missionary's own spirit and sometimes even by the spirit of darkness.

Well, my dear confrere, I don't know what moved me to develop these ideas. So far as I know, you work with all the power of your soul to practice the precept of Our Lord, "Learn of Me. . .," and I have no doubt but that divine grace is powerfully at work in your soul to give you those two holy virtues.

[*Duties of a Superior*]

In regard to your relations with your confreres, act toward them with gentleness, affection, moderation, simplicity, and confidence. Bear their faults with love and patience. Console them in their troubles and, as much as possible, sustain them

LETTER TO FATHER CHARLES LAIRÉ

in their temptations. Preserve among them peace, gentleness, charity and the most perfect harmony. Our Lord will dwell among us if we are truly united in His Holy Name; but if our hearts are not united, He is not in our midst and His blessing can in no way be given to us.

Observe the rule with great fidelity; it is the safeguard of fervor and the only certain guarantee against laxity. Without fidelity to the observance of the rule, it is impossible to prevent laxity, hence see to it that the rule is faithfully observed in the community of which you have charge. . . .

Urge the Fathers and the Brothers not to neglect the confreres in Europe who love them tenderly and are anxious to receive frequent letters from them. Ask them now to write to this and then to that confrere. In this way the holy charity that ought to unite us in Jesus and Mary will be perfect, and God will bless us.

Adieu, dear confrere.

Entirely yours in Jesus and Mary,

FRANCIS LIBERMANN, Superior