

23. LETTER TO FATHER JEAN CLAUDE DURET

Jean Claude Duret (1824-1875) entered Libermann's novitiate in 1848. He was sent to Dakar in the following year and ordained a priest shortly after his arrival. In 1873, he became Vicar Apostolic of Senegambia. He died at Dakar, December 29, 1875.

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*A holy life is the most powerful means to bring souls to God.
Gentleness in dealing with others. Fidelity to the rule.*

Paris, May 10, 1851 Vol. 13, p. 146

Dear Confrere:

I finally received news from you and I must say it gave me great joy. Continue to send news, now to me and at times to your other confreres who are "exiled" in Europe or to your former directors.

*[A Holy Life is a Priest's Most Powerful Means
to Attract Souls]*

You are now established at Great-Bassam. The people in this place are not yet well-disposed for the reception of the seed of the Gospel, but your presence among them will soften them in cooperation with the grace and mercy of God.

In any case, even when souls are eager to accept that divine seed and receive it with simplicity and docility, the missionary has a twofold need of being holy. First he has to draw down God's blessings on the souls which he is called to evangelize; and secondly, his personal holiness is required as an example of holy living. But when souls are still so much

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enslaved to the devil that God's word cannot touch their heart, then it is absolutely necessary for the missionary to be holy. For he has to soften those hearts and to make them receive God's word from his mouth with proper dispositions; and this cannot be accomplished by mere human words. He has to draw countless graces and powerful blessings from God and it is only through a saintly life that he will obtain such favors.

Since mere human words will not be successful, the missionary must make use of another word, namely that of a holy life. And this life must be so holy that everything in the missionary is truly a message of God for those poor souls that are spiritually starved and diseased.

[*An Ordinary Christian Life is Not Enough*]

It would be a great mistake to believe that since those souls are in a savage and corrupted condition, it suffices to lead, in their presence, merely the life of an ordinary good Christian. It would be a great mistake, I repeat, to think that such a spectacle would be powerful enough to affect men who are leading a life that remains almost wholly on the animal level. This would be a serious error, even humanly speaking. An ordinary good life, in the sense I have explained, appears to the common sense of those people as nothing more than a life after the European fashion; it does not appear to them as a *holy* life. If they see in the missionary something by which he differs from other Europeans, they either attribute it to purely natural reasons or are unable to grasp why he is different. As long as they notice that the missionary remains even slightly attached to his passions and to the world, they unavoidably see in him no more than an ordinary man who is more or less good.

On the contrary, when the missionary leads a truly holy life, they recognize him to be a man of God. Moreover a holy

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life emits a fragrance which unconsciously attracts even souls that are mired in vice. Divine grace and God's blessings then come along to second the priest's efforts. Be holy, therefore, as Our Lord Jesus Christ was holy. He sanctified Himself to sanctify His own: "For them do I sanctify myself."

It is evident, therefore, that the missionary ought first to sanctify himself if he wishes to sanctify souls. If you fail to see the fruits of your holy life at the time when you expected them, reflect and recall what Jesus Himself accomplished in Judea. How few there were in His own lifetime who surrendered to him. And yet how many later became disciples of Christ! Have courage then and labor with constancy and fidelity.

[Gentleness in Dealing with Others]

Try to preserve a spirit of mental prayer. Nourish constantly the practical desire—the earnest will—to belong truly and entirely to God. Preserve the spirit of faith and that of practical and effective love for God. Live for Him and consecrate all your labors to Him. Tame the unruly movements of your nature and watch over the passionate emotions of your soul, not only when they spring from the corruption of the flesh, but be especially watchful against the movements of pride, sensitiveness, and irritability, for the climate of your beloved Africa easily arouses the impressionable part of your nature and incites it to a certain irritability.

Be interiorly peaceful, calm and gentle, preserving these dispositions at all times, everywhere, in all circumstances and in your relations with all persons. Be humble, obedient, and joyful.

[Fidelity to the Rule]

Observe your rule with care. This observance sums up everything. When regularity is observed well in our com-

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munities, I am certain that all our dear confreres will remain fervent. On the contrary, every time regularity is neglected, I feel unable to guarantee anything, but am convinced that laxity will enter into souls.

Be faithful therefore, beloved confrere, and God will be faithful to you. *Adieu.*

Entirely yours in Jesus and Mary,

FRANCIS LIBERMANN, Superior