

## 12. LETTER TO MR. HACQUIN, SEMINARIAN

Mr. Hacquin studied at the Seminary of Meaux. Later he joined the Society of Jesus. He died at Versailles in 1880.

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*Past infidelities do not prevent Jesus from loving you. The dignity of the priesthood and practical advice about the priestly life.*

Rennes, May 20, 1838

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Praised be Jesus and Mary

Dear Friend:

*[Jesus Loves You Despite Your Infidelities]*

May Jesus establish His reign in your soul and fill you with His divine Spirit. This you are very much in need of at the present time. If Jesus did not accomplish everything in you, of what use would you be, except to supply fagots for Hell? I see from your letter that you realize this very well. I bless our beloved Lord and His most holy Mother for it.

Fill yourself with the sentiment of your poverty and incapacity; in this way you will really give greater glory to our Divine Master. You have been foolish until now, but our kind and dear Mother has been watching over you and she has preserved you in spite of all your infidelities. Be sorry, dear confrere, and humble yourself for having been unfaithful for such a length of time to so dear, so great and adorable a Master, but don't worry about it. You see that

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He still loves you with extreme tenderness, in spite of your past infidelities. He overwhelms you with favors and graces. He calls you to His divine priesthood and inspires you with a great desire for your sanctification. Oh! How kind is the meek and most lovable Lord Jesus! Isn't He sweet and delightful to those whom His Father has given to Him? And to whom do you owe all this? To our well-beloved Mother! It is she who accomplishes all those good and lovely things. Be full of courage therefore.

You have never been wicked. You have always desired to serve God and to please Him but you have been weak and thoughtless. What can you do now? Those days are gone, and you cannot bring them back. If that time were returned to you, you might perhaps do even worse. Leave things as they are and don't worry about the past. Instead, put your whole confidence, your joy and love in Him who calls you to such great things and bestows upon you such great favors.

### [*The Dignity of the Priesthood*]

Remain in an attitude of lowliness and humiliation before Him, keeping in mind how useless and dissipated you have been in the past, and fill yourself with salutary desires for your sanctification. How great, how beautiful your vocation! Oh, if you could but appreciate how sublime it is, how holy, and how greatly it is above human strength! Your letter shows that you have some idea of that, but why not think of it as Our Lord Himself conceives it? Why not strive to form of it an idea that is complete and embraces its full value?

Be holy, for a priest who is not holy is a monster in the order of grace. Those who are about to be ordained to the priesthood usually take resolutions in regard to others. They picture the different works of zeal in which they will be

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engaged, they think of the way they will conduct themselves in relations with parishioners, how they will order their sermons and homilies, and similar things. Now, it is much preferable to begin by making resolutions for yourself, for your greater sanctification.

Here is what I think you could do to be a holy priest. During the little time that is still at your disposal [before your ordination], apply yourself well to your mental prayer. Take some good resolutions regarding that subject and make them as firm as possible. After that, examine carefully what are your principal shortcomings. Give first attention to those that are harmful to yourself because they prevent you from giving yourself completely to God. These are interior defects that arrest good desires, cool off the ardor of the soul, and prevent it from remaining recollected.

### *[Practical Rules for Your Priestly Life]*

Next, take hold of those that hinder you in relation to your neighbor. Examine what your relations with them ought to be in the place and position you will probably occupy; consider what things might be injurious to your soul, and then take some resolutions that will form part of your private rule.

A priest ought to be without desires or affection for the things of this earth. "Let your conversation be in heaven," St. Paul said to the faithful; what, then, should be the attitude of priests?

Let me tell you here, by way of teasing you a little, that you should not be attached to books, especially rare books. Do not be avid to possess expensive books. What you spend for unnecessary books is stolen from the poor. The poor are the great treasure of the priest; they are the bank into which he puts his money like a usurer.

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If you want to follow my advice or rather answer my prayer which I address to you most earnestly and in the name of Jesus and Mary, do not live with your sisters. Rather take a stranger and eat dry bread than to invite your sisters to keep house for you.

Never have a surplus of money and don't give any to the members of your family except when it is strictly necessary. If they can manage without your help, even with some difficulty, it is better to reserve everything for the poor. Be careful on this point, for I know you and the evil that would result would be considerable. Use all the money you have for the beauty of your church and feeding the poor. The church is your house; the poor are your family. All others must be strangers to you. Don't use money to decorate your own dwelling. Look upon yourself as the poorest man in your parish and live soberly from your income. Then use the rest for your brethren the poor or for the house of God.

Be careful also not to be ruled by your housekeeper. Don't become familiar with her. Be kind, though reserved. Never speak to her, nor allow her to speak to you, about parish matters. Never engage in a discussion with her. Speak to her only about what concerns the household and do so quietly, charitably and with humility of heart, and avoid all semblance of haughtiness, for this is very bad. If she speaks to you, listen to her and answer her with kindness, but do not let yourself go to long explanations.

In general try to be more reserved with everybody than you usually are. Live a secluded life, without paying constant social calls, and occupy yourself solely with your own affairs. Don't become familiar with anyone, but be kind and pleasant toward all. Be moderate in your words and deportment from a pure spirit of charity. When your ministry does not call you away, remain at home and study or pre-

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pare your sermons. Set aside certain times for your recreation during the day when you can work in your garden. Do all this with simplicity, avoiding tenseness and rigidity.

Pay attention in your examination of conscience to shortcomings that may harm your ministry, such as vivacity, levity, childishness, weakness of character, and effusiveness. The tendency to these faults makes us say things that hurt or please, they prompt talkativeness, and cause us to seek the company of those who like us, try to be agreeable to us, or flatter us.

Never give up prayer and the practice of the presence of God. Prepare well for Holy Mass and never fail to make a thanksgiving for at least a quarter of an hour. Don't adopt the airs and manners of the world but preserve ecclesiastical simplicity and modesty.

I earnestly advise you to put in your rule all these points and others which God may suggest to you. Always keep a great devotion toward the Blessed Virgin, your kind and beloved Mother. Pray continually to her that she may protect you against lukewarmness and dissipation and make you faithful to the good resolutions which you will take when entering upon your priesthood and to the rules you have written down for that purpose. I on my part will pray with all my heart for those intentions and I will make novenas, the first of which is almost finished.

My best regards. I rejoice seeing the good desires which Our Lord has put in your heart and I hope that He will also help you to fulfill them.

Entirely yours in Jesus and Mary,

FRANCIS LIBERMANN, ACOLYTE