

18. LETTERS TO FATHER JEAN BAPTISTE
FRANÇOIS

Jean Baptiste François (1823-1900) entered the novitiate in 1846 and was ordained a priest in 1848. He was secretary to Father Libermann until January, 1851 when he received an appointment for Reunion. After returning to France in 1865, he was sent to Haiti and to Bordeaux, and in 1888 to Guiana. He died in Langonnet, France in 1900.

57

Farewell letter to a departing missionary.

Letter One

February 19, 1851

Vol. 13, p. 36

J. M. J.

My dear confrere :

I greatly rejoice to find you so happy and I bless God for it with all my heart.

Have confidence! God is with you. Do not nurse regrets. We live to sacrifice everything that is in us to our good Master and nothing in the world ought to be excepted from that sacrifice, for we belong entirely to Him. Sacrifice yourself constantly, especially in your interior: sacrifice your desires, your sentiments, your affections, your ideas, and your own will; in a word, all that is in you—and also all that is outside you, as long as it is in conformity with God's good pleasure. . . .

I am not as daring as you are when you say *adieu* forever. Nevertheless, if it be God's will that it is to be forever, feel certain that my heart will be constantly with you. I will re-

LETTERS TO FATHER JEAN BAPTISTE
FRANÇOIS

joyce with your joys and take part in your tribulations. Let all be accepted and borne in God and for His holy love!

May the peace of Our Lord be with you and fill your heart!

Entirely yours in Jesus and Mary,

FRANCIS LIBERMANN, Superior

58

Don't be a "savage." Send me your impressions of our community in Mauritius.

Letter Two

February 24, 1851

Vol. 13, p. 58

Dear Father François:

You've already become a savage, even before your departure! So we can imagine what you will be like later! We are waiting for replies but they don't come. You have no permission from me to play the savage! . . .

After your arrival in Mauritius, observe everything and try to profit from it. Give me details about that mission and the dear confreres who labor there. Send me your judgments about it and them, but don't attach too much importance to your own impressions and judgments. Many things cannot be rightly appraised by one who merely passes through a place. Nevertheless, it will be useful for me to hear two witnesses report on something which I am not able to see for myself.

Father Le Vavasseur has given me his opinion and, although yours has less weight, I shall be able to obtain a

SPIRITUAL LETTERS OF FRANCIS LIBERMANN

more correct view of things when I see where your thoughts differ from his.

Do it in all simplicity. I don't make this request of you because I wish to base my action on your ideas but rather in order to make it easier for me to form an opinion. Hearing only one person would make this very difficult for me. Even if you had a thousand times less experience, your account would be very useful for me. . . .

Adieu, dear confrere. Belong always totally to God in self-abnegation, peace, mildness and humility of heart.

Entirely yours in the charity of
Jesus and Mary,

FATHER FRANCIS LIBERMANN

59

Father Libermann examines the case of a sick Brother who is said to be preparing a severe purgatory for himself.

Letter Three

Vol. 13, p. 79

Notre Dame du Gard, March 22, 1851

Dear Confrere :

I had to go to Amiens yesterday and, being unable to reply in person to your question about Brother Augustus, I've asked Father Delaplace to answer without telling him why. . . . Father Briot has informed me also of all the extraordinary events he has mentioned to you. All this has made me very uneasy about the person [allegedly favored with extraordinary graces]. . . .

However, let us return to the case of our little Brother Augustus [who is somehow connected with these extraordi-

*LETTERS TO FATHER JEAN BAPTISTE
FRANÇOIS*

nary events]. The remark has been made that this poor boy "will have a severe purgatory." I found faults in him, but nothing that was serious. I wanted to probe his soul to see whether there was perhaps a fault in him that was more grave than usual in souls that are solidly devout and religiously well-disposed. I spoke to him first about his past and then about the present. I made him understand that purgatory is long and severe if a soul at the time of its separation from the body still remains attached to venial sin. The poor man was recollected, humbly disposed, and devoutly moved by a fear of God which was full of love. I did not detect anything in him that was serious when I examined him according to the line I have described.

I concluded that he is pleasing to God and that if there is still something that needs to be erased it is nothing out of the ordinary. However the eye of man cannot penetrate into the depths of a soul and the little Brother might be wanting in sufficient self-knowledge. Hence my findings cannot give convincing proof; I can merely make a solid conjecture. This conjecture, though, is strengthened by the whole conduct of the little Brother since the time he has known that he is condemned to die.

This Brother expectorates considerably and sometimes has vomiting spells. He has a distaste for food. Brother Fulgentius sometimes gives him dishes that revolt his stomach; at least this happens occasionally. He is very weak, and as you know, he is not a hardy and energetic character. Yet, he remains always humble, peaceful, and gentle, and there is a constant smile on his lips. He never utters the least word of dissatisfaction; he never shows the least worry or impatience, and he talks about death as one talks about going to a wedding. He shows a courage that astonishes me.

SPIRITUAL LETTERS OF FRANCIS LIBERMANN

The little Brother often gets up for the five o'clock Mass for the Brothers, he often goes to the Chapel and kneels down. He made his vows on the feast of St. Joseph and remained kneeling behind me throughout Benediction because no one thought of telling him to sit down, and I could not tell him, for I happened to be the celebrant. To sum up: the little Brother in every circumstance shows manly courage and does all this unostentatiously and with a most persevering fervor. Note that this is not a case of sensible devotion which sometimes serves to sustain imperfect souls. He has no sensible devotion; he is "dry," except at the moment of Consecration. Here is genuine and solid fervor. All this makes me doubt very much [that there is anything seriously wrong with him]. . . .

Adieu, dear confrere.

Entirely yours in Jesus and Mary,

FATHER FRANCIS LIBERMANN