

IX. LETTERS TO CLEMENCE GODRAND

Miss Clemence Godrand, an illegitimate child and rejected even by her mother, had finally at the age of fifteen found a refuge at the orphanage near Father Libermann's novitiate. To protect the girl against further persecution by her cruel mother and to provide her with a measure of emotional security, Father Libermann and two other priests took the unusual step of adopting her. Under his guidance, her tortured soul gradually regained its composure and in time she developed a flourishing spiritual life. Her illegitimacy, however, raised an almost insuperable obstacle when she wanted to enter a convent. Undaunted by the opposition, Father Libermann stood by the unusual candidate and finally managed to have her accepted in the novitiate of a well-regulated convent of Sisters.

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Letter One La Neuville, November 30, 1844 Vol. 6, p. 460

J. M. J.

My dear child:

I know very well that the reason why you wish to talk to me about your interior life is that you are eager to overcome all the obstacles to God's grace. I know that you suffer and I pray for your soul, but remember that you must explain to me in what way you suffer.

Tell your troubles to Mary, your good and beloved Mother; if she is unable to console you, then it will be clear to you that those sorrows are useful for the salvation of your soul, and must be borne for the love of God. Why desire to be

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without pain, sorrow and trouble, when Jesus, your sweet and good Savior, desired to endure all these for love of us. Give yourself, then, with all your heart to this divine Savior and, through patient enduring, try to profit from your pains for your salvation and progress in virtue. You know how much you need to make progress. If, later on, you are called to live in the world, how will you be able to conduct yourself properly, if you have not acquired solid virtue? Be sure of one thing: without pains and crosses, you will not be able to acquire solid virtue.

Reflect on how short the time is that we spend on this earth and how long eternity will be. All our life is but an instant; eternity is endless. Is it not right, my dear child, that we should bear a small momentary pain, that lasts but the twinkling of an eye, in order that we may earn an immense weight of blessedness throughout eternity? If you could understand the advantage of suffering in this world, you would consider yourself most blessed because you have sorrow. I would even go further and say that pain is necessary for your salvation, since your flighty and lively mind and sensitive heart could cause you to lose your soul a thousand times over. You must get control over your impetuous, sensitive and volatile temperament, and the only way in which you can gain that control is through pain, trouble and sorrow. Bear your sufferings peacefully and humbly and with docile submission to God's will. Do not arouse your imagination but try to be moderate in all things and abandon yourself to God's guidance. At the same time, open your heart to your confessor. It is possible that he will not say the same things to you as I do, but that does not matter. You must see God in him and approach him with simplicity. Have confidence also in your Mother Superior. I feel sure from all that she has told me about you, that she loves you and is ready to help you as much as she can.

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When you suffer it is not at all necessary that others should notice it. On the contrary, you should do all you can to hide your pains. Do not tell your troubles to anyone except those who are God's representatives to you. When you cannot tell these latter, then go to Jesus and Mary and abandon yourself with confidence into their hands. Above all, never yield to discouragement.

I am sure that your grandmother will send you money when you need it. If it should become necessary that you should go to live with your grandmother in her old age, do not be in too much of a hurry to leave but try first to acquire the knowledge and virtues which will help you to be useful to her. When you are ready to go to live with her, tell me first what conditions at her house are like, what she does, what people live with her, and who her associates are. When we know this we will be able to take the necessary precautions to prevent harm to your soul. You know that there are always young men-boarders in her house and that you will be exposed to numerous dangers.

Your letter came while I was absent and hence the delay in replying. I shall give Mother Stanislaus your message. It is somewhat late now to be thinking of the anniversary of your baptism, but what can we do? I think that Mother Stanislaus will send you the things you asked for.

Please give my best regards to the Mother Superior of your house, and recommend me to her prayers.

I am, in Jesus and Mary,

Your most humble servant,

FATHER FRANCIS LIBERMANN

Letter Two *La Neuville, June 17, 1845* *Vol. 7, p. 216*

J. M. J.

My dear child:

Have courage, the good Lord loves you, and I believe that you love Him a little also, even if it be very little. This suffices for, at present, He does not ask any more from you, but so arranges things that later on you will love Him very much. He keeps a little vigil light burning in your heart, and it is quite clear to you that no winds or storms are able to extinguish it. Later on this vigil light will burst forth as a great fire. At present, because there is too much green wood, it cannot enkindle a blaze. Have courage, the good Lord loves you, and He is so arranging things that the green wood will dry and the fire of divine love will inflame it. It is with the fire of tribulation that He dries the wood and, when everything is prepared, He will enkindle His divine fire and your soul will be filled with Him.

In the meantime you must suffer, and even when that adorable fire of Jesus is alight, you will still have to suffer for, as you well know, you are made to be crucified with Jesus on the Cross. What happiness! Nature cries out and resists. Let it cry; submit and abandon yourself with all your soul to the law of suffering, which the love of the Heart of Jesus imposes on the heart of His poor prodigal child.

If you surrender wholeheartedly to the most loving will of your beloved Jesus, you will undoubtedly suffer, but, at the same time, you will taste the sweetness of possessing the dear Savior in your soul. He will grow there, and, at least from time to time, will console you. He will sustain,

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strengthen, and sanctify you, and when the end comes, He will glorify you for all eternity.

If you should refuse to surrender—but I am sure that this will never happen since you want to belong to God, and do, even now, belong to Him and will always be His—if you hinder and oppose His sweet will, or if you absolutely refuse to suffer, well, you will have to suffer any way. You will suffer much more because you will suffer without consolation, far from your Beloved, without merit, and to your own ruin.

Continue therefore to accept your sufferings with submissiveness and abandonment and you will thus sanctify your soul; your pains will diminish, you will have intervals of happiness, or rather, will be always happy even in the midst of pain. We are always happy when we are with Jesus, even when we are with Him on Calvary, provided we are there willingly.

Finally, be assured that it is infinitely better and more blessed to be with Jesus and Mary on Calvary than to be with Herod in his royal palace; and that holds even in this world. There is then no alternative. You will suffer with Jesus and He will be with you. This is a contract you have made with Jesus and Mary and you can be certain that they will not be the first to break the contract. If you are faithful you will be one of the happiest souls in the world.

Let us draw some practical conclusions from this:

1. Interior sufferings are necessary for you. Why? Because you are naturally inclined to self-love, vanity, and self-esteem. If you had not suffered these interior sorrows, you would have had an exalted opinion of yourself; you would be proud, always preoccupied with self; would take satisfaction from the fact that others thought well of you and commit a thousand other such faults. Mary, your good Mother, loves to have children that are humble, and it was thus necessary

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to overcome your self-love. She spoke to her Beloved Son about the matter, and He, to please His divine Mother and satisfy her Heart so full of love for her little sister, has set about the task. He has shown His Mother that this little sister should be very humble and little. He has already accomplished much and will finish the task little by little.

2. You are by nature exuberant, eager for enjoyment, and rather partial to self. Where would this have led you? Not to Jesus, but to the satisfactions of nature. Our divine Lord who died on Calvary does not want this to happen. It is His wish that you suffer with Him. He wants your heart to belong to him, and His desire is that that heart should be the heart of a child and a spouse. Do you think that He could tolerate a heart immersed in the pleasures of nature of which He does not approve? Would it be right that a child, a spouse, should be filled with joys and satisfaction while her Father, her Spouse, is hanging on the Cross?

Do you understand now why it is necessary for you to suffer pain? If He allowed your heart to be filled with joys, even spiritual joys, it is certain that you would have fallen victim to that fault which I mentioned. Now, however, your soul seeks Jesus, who is your only happiness. Your happiness is not to be found in those joys. In order to achieve this happiness, you must abandon yourself to the Divine Master.

3. You have a frivolous temperament. You like to laugh and frisk about. If you did not have to suffer, this would have led you to dissipation; you would never have acquired true virtue; you would have remained superficial and never reached solid virtue. Jesus does not care for one who is always thoughtless and scatter-brained. He likes order. He sends you afflictions and crosses and by means of these He leads you and controls you. If you are perfectly submissive—

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and you will have seen that He helps you with His grace and strength to allow Him to rule you—you will be gay amidst your pains, you will acquire solid virtue, you will become more consistent in doing good, you will attach yourself more and more to the Beloved of your heart, and you will become calm, modest, meek and faithful to grace.

Does the Heart of Jesus love you? He certainly does love you greatly. Love Him in return, love His Cross, be submissive and holy, and try to profit by the crucifying goodness of the crucified Jesus. What is the source of your pains? It is the fact that you are sensitive and impressionable and have a lively imagination which can at times become violent. But, if you are faithful to God, you will conquer this to your great advantage, and will then be more tranquil. You have a volatile disposition, and in spite of your naturally excessive gaiety, there is always an underlying sadness. What can you do about that? These evil propensities are part of your nature and you must submit to the good pleasure of God, Who permits these things for your sanctification. Nothing will better serve the purpose of detaching you from earth and attaching you to the divine Master than those pains. You will be sustained and made to profit from these sufferings by the grace of Christ which abounds in you. I have already told you that to suffer thus is most useful and necessary for you, so carry your cross after Jesus with love and humility. When your sufferings are intense, remain prostrate at the feet of the Savior, offer Him your soul, abandon yourself to His divine Will, and you will be at peace in your sufferings. Avoid being preoccupied with self and, when you suffer, distract your mind and avoid self-pity. Act in such a way that others will not notice your sufferings, and speak of them only to those who are responsible for directing you, the mistress of novices or the Superior. Be always outwardly gay and even-tempered, and thus avoid looking for attention from others

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by forgetting self. You have made great progress in this, already, since your stay at Abbeville. Be humble before Our Lord in the midst of your pains. Distrust your imagination, try to control it, and place your trust in Jesus and Mary. Take heart and do not fear, Jesus and Mary are with you.

Follow the direction of Father de Brandt with regard to your vocation. I will go further to say that from this moment you should consider the mistress of novices as your mother and should follow the rule as if you were already a novice or a postulant. It is important that you should adopt this rule, and once you do you will be at peace. Do not think of other convents. A long time ago Father de Brandt and I considered whether there might be some other convent to which the Lord would seem to call you, and we failed to find such a convent. You are in a house that is pious and regular, where they know you, love you, and would gladly receive you, so be at peace. You could not find a better community than that in which you now are, and I know of no other which would be more suitable for you.

Be convinced, therefore, in your own mind, that the pious house in which you now are is the one that best suits you. Try to see the mistress of novices frequently. Your antipathy to her does not worry me. You will soon overcome this and when you have overcome it, I must warn you to avoid being carried away by a too lively and natural affection for her. You will see that your antipathy will be changed into a strong regard, and there is a danger that it might degenerate in the way I have mentioned.

You are greatly mistaken if you think that you have no confidence in Father Porchez. Whatever you may say to the contrary, I say that you can be assured that you have confidence in him. But you will answer: "I know quite well that I have not such confidence." I assure you that you have confidence, and I know this better than you. Therefore, dis-

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trust your imagination which tells you that you have no confidence in the Father. He is a holy priest, and I am certain that you will have confidence in him. The thought comes to you that you have no confidence and you begin to believe that this is so. On the contrary, it is false and prevents you from opening your heart completely to him. This is a prejudice of which you must rid your mind, and the same applies to the mistress of novices. Do as I say and you will see that I am right. You know that we have often argued about this, and when you thought that you knew better than I what was happening in the depths of your soul, you were always mistaken, and are mistaken now.

You suffer because the religious go out to the parish on a Sunday. You must despise such a thought, which is a scruple, or rather, an illusion, or perhaps childishness. Forget about it and give yourself to the good Lord. Father de Brandt is the one who started the task of deciding your vocation and he has acted with great wisdom. It is he, also, who must complete the task. In the meantime, decide on staying in the house in which you are and think no longer of going elsewhere. Your heart will find rest there in the midst of your sufferings. They love you, and you will do good there and will sanctify yourself.

Give my best regards to Mother Superior. I would have liked to write to her to explain your case, but she will, no doubt, read this letter and that will suffice.

Your most humble servant,

FATHER FRANCIS LIBERMANN

J. M. J.

My dear child:

Don't worry, I am not forgetting you. I did not want to reply to your letter until I should have seen Father de Brandt, and I was unable to meet him until now. I will write briefly as I want to post the letter to-day so as not to prolong your worry.

I won't enter into details about the matters you mentioned in your letter. Father de Brandt will be in Abbeville in May and you can talk the matter over with him. I have shown him your letter and told him what I thought of it. I am very pleased with your good sentiments, and we must thank Our Lord and His good Mother, who is also your Mother, for this grace. You suffer, but this is true joy. You may, perhaps, have to suffer throughout your life, and this, also, would be a great blessing. Be patient and submissive to the will of God. Those pains and crosses will be the means of saving your soul. I have frequently told you that you would find it very difficult to belong truly to God, if you did not have crosses.

Tell your good Mother that I would like to see her, and that I would appreciate it if she could come. When, on the advice of Father de Brandt—which is also my advice—you have decided your vocation, you can give a definite answer to that good Mother.

May the peace of Our Lord be with you! Be always good, regular, fervent, joyous and contented in the midst of all the pains you may have to suffer. Be docile to the divine will, faithful to God, and full of tender love for Mary. I remain,

Your most humble servant in Jesus and Mary,

FRANCIS LIBERMANN