

XIV. LETTERS TO MISS BARBIER

Miss Barbier felt a strong inclination for the religious life but there were great obstacles in the way. Her parents and more specially one of her brothers were opposed to her entrance into a religious congregation and, besides, she was afflicted by serious illness and nervous troubles.

Father Libermann knew both kinds of trials from personal experience and his letters to Miss Barbier show how he was able to use her difficulties as an occasion for progress in perfection. Her trials and crosses led her to a more intimate union with the Crucified.

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*Your brother's opposition is a cross Jesus wants you to bear.
Let God be your consolation and your only love.*

Letter One Amiens, June 5, 1845 Vol. 7, p. 189

J. M. J.

Dear Miss Barbier :

[Bear Man's Opposition as a Cross Sent by God]

Your letter consoled and grieved me at the same time. I felt grief because I should have liked to give you the comfort and encouragement which you need in your present painful situation. A visit from me or a short note would have helped you a hundred times more than the remedies that have been given you. But what can we do? Your good parents do not properly understand. They imagine things that are *non-existent*, and in spite of all their affection for you they cause you suffering. Do not bear any ill-will towards them on that account. It is God who wants you to be on a cross—remain in peace. If it is possible for you to receive a letter from me

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from time to time without the knowledge of your parents, ask, and I shall gladly comply with your wishes.

In your present condition you are in need of counsel. Send me your letters then through the intermediary of a person whom you can trust, and I will reply to you, for I greatly desire to help you. If you received my letters openly, this would irritate your poor brother who, by the way, is much more to be pitied than yourself. It is now three or four months that he has had that fever of exasperation which is so violent that it could lead him to the greatest excesses.

This then is what grieves me: I should like to give you all the comfort and encouragement which your condition demands, but I am unable to do so as fully as I would like.

On the other hand I am consoled because I see that the Divine Savior is wonderfully replacing me in your behalf. He does directly what He could have desired to do through this poor and miserable servant, so you are that much more fortunate. Fear nothing, He will not abandon you.

[Let God Be Your Consolation and Your Love]

Your letter shows very clearly that God consoles and sustains you; this gives me great pleasure. He deigns to nail you to the cross and this, for a true Christian, means happiness. In it you will find the means for your spiritual advancement. One day spent amid pains that are borne with resignation gives more strength and is more beneficial to our souls than all interior consolations. Be, then, always strong in the faith and have confidence in Jesus and Mary. Be strong in your love for God, strong in the spirit of sacrifice, and be happy because you are able to suffer something for the love of the Divine Master and to unite your sufferings with His.

You ought to be full of gratitude and full of love for God. He shows His love for you by the very pains He permits you

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to bear. Men, by their wickedness or good will toward you, are the instruments of the mercy of the Divine Master toward you. Bless God's goodness at all times and love tenderly the instruments He uses; be mild and kind towards them; pardon them, for they are doing incalculable good to you.

Always maintain peacefulness of soul; be gentle, preserve sweet and modest gaiety that belongs to a beloved child of God. Accustom yourself little by little to remain undisturbed by oppression and injustice. In this you must imitate your Beloved, who bore, with divine calm, the most unjust and atrocious oppression and persecution. Be like Him whom you have chosen with the intention of belonging entirely to Him. Excitement is very harmful to both your body and your soul; therefore, be firm toward yourself and firm also in your love of God.

What does it matter that men do good or evil to you, that they flatter or crush you? God is with you! Does it matter that you are able to follow your own tastes or that they are contradicted?

One thing suffices for you: "your Beloved is to you and you are to Him." No man can take that happiness from you. On the contrary, the more you have to suffer, the greater your happiness will be. Therefore, strive always to suffer in peace, with humility, love, and perfect submission to the will of God who desires to keep you on the cross.

Once more I advise you not to occupy yourself with the question of your vocation. All you have to do for the present is to try to recover your health, if this be in accordance with God's Holy Will. May the peace of Jesus be with you!

Your most humble servant,

FATHER FRANCIS LIBERMANN

*Christ's Cross is good for your soul. Jesus is your Spouse.
The fruits of the Cross. How to deal with nervous
afflictions.*

Letter Two

Vol. 7, p. 235

July 2, Feast of the Visitation, 1845

Praised be Jesus and Mary!

Dear Miss Barbier :

[*Christ's Cross is Good for Your Soul*]

I have received your letter of June 25th. The good Master is fulfilling and will always fulfill His divine words: "Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted."

I greatly rejoiced at the sight of all the good He is doing to your soul through the instrumentality of His Cross. He has planted it solemnly—deeply—in the depths of your heart. It would seem that it has taken root there. Yes, it has taken root, and when your beloved parents no longer afflict you, the Cross will continue to be your lot. It will always remain your inheritance, or at least for a very long time, for it has taken root in you. The Cross is a beautiful tree, a good tree planted in your soul and it is now producing beautiful flowers; at a later date it will yield beautiful fruit. "A good tree", says the Savior, "can only produce good fruit." What kind of fruit? Those which He bore on Calvary. Jesus Himself will be formed in your soul by means of the Cross.

[*Jesus, the Spouse of Your Soul*]

This is how it comes about :

Jesus, has for a long time, desired to live in your soul through "the sanctity of His ways and the truth of His

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virtues." He has sought constantly to draw you by the sweetness of His grace, by the beauty of His light, by the balm of His peace. You have followed Him as a sheep follows its shepherd, and He feeds you with milk and honey. You have seen Him, known Him, and followed Him. He has delighted your heart and all else in you. Whatever is not Jesus, has become insipid to you. You have desired to follow Him forever, to withdraw into solitude with Him, to choose Him for your Spouse, in order that you might rest always on His Heart, live in His heavenly intimacy, and feed on His divine and delicious love.

You wanted to be the spouse of Jesus, but this is not accomplished so quickly. It is a great King whom you desire to espouse. He chose you and attracted you to Himself. He instilled His Divine Love in your soul; it was He who made the approaches. The divine nuptials, it seemed, would take place without trouble—but lo and behold! Jesus asks a dowry—not one of gold or silver, however, as worldly souls might imagine for they do not know how delicate and pure are the sentiments inspired by the Spirit of God. The gift which Jesus demands from you is the complete sacrifice of yourself. He bears the cost, He takes charge of executing His designs; He plants His Cross in your soul and immolates you to His divine love. Abandon your self into His hands.

You desired to belong to Jesus, to be His spouse and be intimately united with Him, but your soul had still many imperfections, attachments, lowly desires. To belong to Jesus it is necessary to be worthy of Him. And how can you make yourself worthy? Only by those sufferings in which your soul has to conquer itself constantly, to renounce and humble itself, to submit and immolate itself with generosity, while the grace and the divine love of Jesus, which are in the depths of your heart, make you constant and faithful in the fulfil-

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ment of all those things and prompt you to do them ever better. The greater your pains, the more deeply your cross is planted in you, the more also will grace and love increase and, as a consequence, your soul will progress proportionately in true holiness. Do you understand now how the Cross produces those delightful fruits in you?

[*The Fruits of the Cross*]

These fruits are the virtues of Jesus, the holiness of Jesus, union with Jesus. Do you know the nuptial hall in which Jesus unites Himself with the Church? It is Calvary. It was there that He sacrificed Himself for the Church to make her worthy of being His spouse. Since then, every soul that desires to be perfectly united with Jesus, must expect that union to be accomplished in immolation. Rejoice therefore, in the midst of tribulations, be strong, be worthy of the crucified Jesus.

Don't be angry with those who are the cause of your troubles. If God has desired to choose as torturers persons who are dear to you, you must nonetheless continue to love them tenderly. Don't grieve, at least don't grieve at the sight of their fault. Be submissive to God in this, as in everything else. Pray to obtain mercy for them. Your affliction should draw down upon them as many graces as are given to you, if this were possible. Although they cause you suffering, do not accuse them, but rather plead and intercede for them. You must do this especially in regard to your poor brother. Do not be his accuser, but his advocate with God, with Mary. Ask this good Mother to come to his defense. If he is guilty, he is more wretched than criminal. Consider only his misfortune and not his fault. See only the pains and anguish he experiences, and not the sentiments that animate him and have made him act that way toward you. Love him more than ever and call down graces upon him. He

will shake off his exasperation, but only later, perhaps too late for you, but that doesn't matter—provided he returns to his God, what more can you desire?

[*How to Deal With Nervous Troubles*]

The pastor wants you to continue to go to Mass. He may be right in this. I don't know your illness well enough to give you positive advice on that subject. I shall say only, that, in general, it is necessary to forget nervous troubles, to neglect and despise them. I was subject to that kind of trouble in my youth in a manner that was quite violent. The thing that caused me most harm was the fear, the anxiety, the precautions.

Try to shake off those movements and agitations of your soul. Distract yourself in such moments. Don't allow yourself to be dominated by that nervous anxiety of the heart but act energetically against those emotions. Put yourself in a state of great indifference in God's presence in respect to either feeling or not feeling those pains. When you have succeeded in becoming so disposed, you must then act as if you had never experienced anything.

I am telling you how I have acted as soon as I began to give myself to the good Lord. This method I have followed in a spirit of faith, with the desire of pleasing God, without thinking of recovering my health by that means, for I had no doubt that this way of acting would be most useful. In fact it has had much to do with procuring my recovery.

If you go to church, you will have the happiness of receiving communion frequently. You could pay a poor woman to help you walk—a poor woman is glad to receive ten or twenty pennies a week for one or two hours of service like that—and, as for yourself, the good you will obtain from it is worth the price.

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Since your conversations with your cousin, Miss Lambre, do you so much good, I don't know why you shouldn't try to see her. If you have a poor woman to take you to church, you will find it easy to visit your cousin also. You could even visit her occasionally instead of going to church, telling her beforehand that you are coming. It might be well perhaps to go by coach to Amiens; distractions, changes are beneficial to nervous troubles. It is important for you to make good use of the summer time. In the fall, it will be more difficult for you to go out. This is the advice generally given to persons who suffer from nervous disorders. I don't know your type of illness well enough to give you my opinion about it.

I don't see any point in your speaking again to your parents about your attraction for the religious life. It can serve no good purpose, for you will merely give them useless grief and expose yourself to new and stronger opposition.

You need rest and consolation; the contradictions and the painful behavior of those with whom you live are harming you. Once again, distract yourself as much as possible and don't remain shut up so much. Go by carriage if you cannot go by donkey; go and visit your friends who live in the neighborhood; see Sister Vasseur, for example, or some other person you know.

Since you so greatly desire to write to me, all right, but do it by mail; and I'll reply by mail. Don't write too often to avoid frightening your parents.

May the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you and with your pious family.

Your most humble servant,

FATHER FRANCIS LIBERMANN

Superior of the Missionaries of the
Holy Heart of Mary

