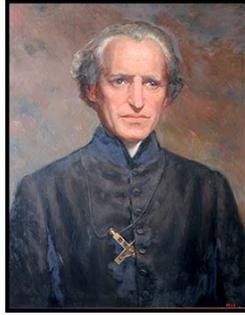


CIRCULAR LETTER #21 OF MOTHER MARY OF THE SEVEN DOLORS



The Mother House
LeMans, France

February 8, 1873

Blessed be the Holy Name of God!

My dear Sisters,

The intensity of our sorrow has delayed somewhat my writing you a detailed account of our Reverend Father Founder's death. Even our most distant houses received news of his passing so you could all gather in spirit about his mortal remains and join with us in offering the first prayers for the repose of his soul. But I know how anxious you all are to know how God saw fit to call to himself this faithful servant who recently completed fifty years of selfless ministry of good works. Would that you were all as fortunate as I - to assist at the last days of a life - precious to God and his Church. You would have learned from our Founder himself how sweet and happy death can be when one has spent himself in the service of God.

It was on January 1st, in his 74th year, that our dear Father Founder found himself stopped short in his labors and I that in the very act of doing a kindness. On the eve, he had received, with his usual good humor, the congratulations of his family and the community. The ninth evening he went to the town of Yvré-l'Évêque, near LeMans, to visit the cure who was ill, and to offer his services as homilist for the next morning.

During the night, our Founder was seized by intense abdominal pain which despite immediate remedies, prevented his saying more than a few words in addressing the congregation. Directly after Mass he returned to LeMans.

When the doctor arrived he began a treatment, something new in our Founder's experience since he had lived long years of forgetfulness of self. Furthermore, he had been blessed with a strong constitution. He told the doctor, nevertheless, that he had been suffering for five months. Yet not one of his three weekly fast days was omitted, nor had he increased his meager evening meal and still drank only water, a habit he developed many years ago.

On the fourth day of the illness, the doctor insisted and so did our Chaplain, that our Founder consent to abandon the reclining chair on which he had slept for over twenty-four years. He had done this to be able to jot down thoughts that occurred to him during the night. He also left the tiny cell where the air supply was no longer sufficient for him in his suffering state. He accepted a regular bed in a larger room where a fire burned, something he never allowed himself even in harsh winter weather.

From the moment our Founder accepted with childlike docility all the painful demands of illness and the attention of our sister infirmarian. In order to sanctify the attention he received, he thought of the *Savior* in His crib “wrapped in swaddling clothes”, he said, “and allowing Himself to be put wherever suited people to put Him.” He added in a spirit of gratitude the words of the Psalmist: “You, O Lord, in your loving providence, have designed to prepare a bed for your sick servant.”

As his illness increased, the soul of our venerable patient was constantly turned to God in prayer. During the last six days, he never stopped. When anyone drew near at any time during those days, or during his sleepless nights, he was heard to pray, using lines from the sacred writings and the liturgy. Mary the Mother of God was constantly present in his prayers. She doubtless obtained special graces for him at this time since we heard him say at one time, “They did wet I to dedicate me to the Blessed Virgin”.

When we heard his patient devout prayers or watched his lips move silently in prayer, we wondered if our dear patient realized he was in the grip of a mortal illness. The fact is that he spoke only with his Lord, asked nothing for his own relief and expressed during twenty days of suffering not a word of complaint. Yet he was grateful for all the care he received. He eagerly welcomed each visit of our chaplain, his nephew. And when attacks of pain or weakness came upon him he held out his hand to him, saying, “You are here”. Then he would return to his rarely interrupted fervent prayer.

Our Reverend Father was optimistic until his last day about regaining his strength, even though long years of meditation on death and many trials had effectively detached him from this life. During the first days of his illness he had a letter sent to a diocesan pastor to inform him that his state of health would prevent his giving the parish mission as he had promised. He was distressed at the inconvenience his absence would cause his friend. A few days later he sent another message saying he felt better and still hoped to fulfill his promise.

From one day to the next our Reverend Founder looked forward to, assisting at the Holy Sacrifice or even to celebrating it, but as he saw the days of his “convalescence” lengthen, he prepared to receive Holy Communion in his room very early in the morning. At the appointed moment he insisted on getting up despite great weakness. He showed his faith and devotion in these words, “You are my witness, O God, that in this moment my soul obeys my body and except for my illness, I would not be thus seated to receive you, but rather on my knees, my forehead pressed to the ground. At least, O my God, I unite the ardent desires of my heart to the adoration of the angels and to the homage of the Saints in similar circumstances. O Jesus, whom I now perceive as through a veil, I beg you grant me what I so desire, that once your face is revealed to me I may be blessed by the vision of your glory”. After receiving communion he said, “*Deo Gratias*” and began reciting the *Te Deum*.

Several days later, Friday the 17th, Feast of St. Anthony the persistence of the high fever and other complications discouraged all our hopes. Our Chaplain once again brought him Holy Viaticum, accompanied as before, by members of the General Council. On approaching the bed the Chaplain said to our Rev. Father, “It is I, my dear Rev. Father. I come to bring you the Savior of our souls, your Consoler and ours, the Lord Jesus, the joy of your youth, the Inspiration of all your works, the closest and often the only witness of your trials, your strongest support in your struggles.

He comes now to suffer with you, to encourage you, strengthen you with his ownpower until he grants your ardent desire the wondrous peace of Heaven". Our Father joined in heart and in words in these sentiments, then recited the Confiteor and received his Lord.

On the evening of the same day, I asked our Chaplain to bring us to our beloved Founder and to ask him on behalf of each one of us, the sad but much-desired souvenir of his last blessing When we were all kneeling about his bed, 'the Chaplain spoke in our name, "Dear Father, here are your spiritual Daughters to whom you have given life. They come to offer you their sympathy in your suffering and their gratitude for all you have done for them by your devotion and example. They kneel to beg your benediction as Founder and Father offering to you a promise of their most fervent prayers and an inviolable fidelity to the Rule you gave them".

"Yes, most willingly," answered Your Founder extending his hands, "May God bless you by my hand. The blessing of God be upon you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit". Our Chaplain added, "The entire Congregation of Marianites is here, my dear Father, your Daughters in the most distant houses are all united in the same desire and beg you to bless them, too, in the person of their Mother General".

"I bless them once again", said our good Founder, "Blessing, absolution, everything I can give..."

On Saturday, the next day, our patient received Extreme Unction, at nine o'clock, and on the evening of the same day, the Apostolic Blessing, with a Plenary Indulgence for the moment of death. Our Father followed with most touching attention the recitation of all the liturgical prayers.

Sunday, the nineteenth, was a day of great anxiety. I spent the night in our dying Founder's room with the Chaplain and three Sisters. He had a moment of intense suffering which the voice and hand of the Chaplain helped him to bear. Toward morning, his breathing was labored and at nine-thirty death was imminent. There was no agony but a gentle sleep-like state during which he did not entirely lose consciousness and could hear our voices recommending his soul to Jesus, to His Holy Mother, to St. Joseph, to the Angels and all the Saints, especially those often invoked by him as missionary and founder: St Vincent de Paul, St. Alphonsus Ligouri, St. Ignatius.

At twelve-thirty, his respiration seemed to stop and at that moment, the ascetic face of our Founder relaxed into a calm, serene beauty. His soul seemed to shine forth from his noble forehead. Then our Chaplain pronounced a final blessing over our dear dying Founder, whom our tears could not keep with us, and gave him as he breathed his last a filial kiss of peace, of peace eternal.

Thus, the immortal soul of our reverend and dear Father Founder returned to the God who created him.

Basil Anthony Marie Moreau, Missionary, former Assistant Superior of the LeMans Seminary, former honorary Canon of the Cathedral of Le Mans, Founder of the House of the Good Shepherd at LeMans, Founder of the House of Holy Cross at LeMans, and of the Institute of the same name, Founder of the Congregation of the Marianites of Holy Cross, was born on February 11th, 1799 at Laigne-en-Belin, Department of Sarthe, France and died on January 20 of this present year 1873 at his home Rue Notre-Dame, 20, near the House of Holy Cross.

Our Father Chaplain, putting aside his own grief attended to all the details of the funeral. He secured for us the consolation of having it held in the Chapel of the Mother House where our Founder had offered Mass each day. His body was exposed there until taken to the cemetery. Day and night six of us were there to watch and pray.

We then saw continuing proof of the deep veneration of the people for our Founder. A never-ending file of people came to pay their respects, many touching their objects of piety to his body. The homage of the public continued right through the actual funeral when people made their way through the crowded congregation to reach the coffin.

It must be said that the sight of our Venerable Founder, laid out in his priestly garb, gave an inexpressible sense of serenity and goodness. His face in death had lost the signs of ceaseless labor and endless fatigue. It was relaxed, rejuvenated and his lips seemed still to pray. During the forty-eight hours before his burial, there was no sign in his features of the ravages of diseases which had in a few short days invaded his body.

The funeral service was celebrated by the Archpriest of the Cathedral, and the candle of honor was carried by the Dean of the Chapter. Two of the four places of honor near the coffin were occupied by the Archpriest of La Fleche, Honorary Canon, and the Chaplain of the Visitation Monastery at LeMans, Honorary Canon; the two others were occupied by the Reverend Father Guardian of the Capuchins of LeMans, and Reverend Father Rector of the Jesuit College of the House of Holy Cross.

It was a great consolation for our Chaplain to obtain authorization for burial in the Cemetery Chapel which our Founder had obtained as the legal burying place of the members of his Institute. This justice in the face of death was unanimously welcomed by the many clergy and friends who accompanied the departed to his place of final rest.

A solemn service with the deacon and sub-deacon was celebrated on the following Wednesday in our convent chapel. Present at it were former students of our Father Founder in the Institute of Holy Cross. After the service on the thirtieth day which we shall celebrate on the 21 of February, we shall continue the same solemn services from month to month until the anniversary of this greatest mourning of our Congregation.

As for you, my dear Daughters, you will, first of all, have three Masses said for the repose of our Founder's soul and secondly for all the deceased of the Congregation, including the service which should be offered in the principal houses of the news of a death.

Furthermore, and for the same intentions, our Mother House and our Provincial Houses will each have sixty Masses said during this year in the respective convent chapels. This is a decision of the Council. Each Sister will offer, three Communion, three Ways of the Cross and three Rosaries.

On Thursday each week, seven Sisters from the Mother House will go in silence to the mortuary chapel where our Founder rests and kneeling about his tomb recite for him and all our departed Sisters the De Profundis, seven Our Fathers, Hail Marys and Glory Be.

At the evening prayers, we shall say the following recommendation: "For our Father Founder, and our deceased Sisters, etc."

The public exercises at the end of the school year should be carried out in keeping with our mourning, with simple gravity. Dramatic dialogues and operettas will be omitted, and presentations limited to reading of students' compositions. These readings could be interspersed with musical selections if this is considered necessary or useful to show students' progress.

While we offer these first suffrages for our Founder, let us all remember that he expects another more personal and more lasting one from his daughters, without which our prayers, our communions, even our Masses would not have their full effectiveness in God's eyes. The special suffrage our Founder expects from us is the sacrifice of ourselves by an entire obedience to the Rule, he gave us, obedience doubly consecrated both by the vow he gave us and by the promise of fidelity which I made to our dying Founder in the name of the Congregation. Let us love it more than ever, this precious Rule which our Founder gave us and in which he continues to live among us. Let us venerate it as a holy monument to his faith, his zeal, and his prayer. Let us observe it faithfully and in all its details. This Rule is so easy, so sweet. The spirit of our Founder lives in it and the Marianites of Holy Cross should always and in all places nourish from it the life of their souls, the life of the Institute.

My dear Sisters, the Rule practiced as our Founder gave it to us, as the Sovereign Pontiff approved it; the Rule, that is, the religious spirit, spirit of our Founder which should be that of the whole Congregation, the Rule alone will preserve, confirm, and develop us for the glory of God and the edification of the Church.

The spirit of our Institute is primarily a spirit of faith, of complete abnegation. This makes it possible to spend ourselves wholly in God's service in whatever works. His provinces and our Constitutions assign to us. Following our Father's example, let us see God in all our actions, seek ourselves in nothing, put our confidence neither in the number of subjects nor the number of houses, nor the impression we make but only in the all-powerful goodness of our Heavenly Father. He created his Church with twelve poor men. He has designed to make us a religious Congregation even when the Superior General and her administration was without a place to live. Let us belong only to God at the foot of the Cross where Our Lord gave us to his Holy Mother. Thus, we shall honor the name of the Virgin of the Seven Sorrows, offer gratitude to our dear Founder and merit for our religious family the long years promised by God as a reward for filial piety.

I shall stop at this point, my dear Daughters. I do not feel able at this moment to speak of the full life of our Founder; however, I could not deprive you any longer of this notice which our Founder received from the Pope on his jubilee. It gave him the greatest joy next to the approbation of our Rule by the Holy See.

To the very Reverend Father Basil Moreau, LeMans

Very Reverend Father, I have taken care to recommend to the Lord several spiritual favors which you desire on your fiftieth year of the priesthood. His Holiness, being aware of this event, sends you his apostolic benediction with a plenary indulgence. Therefore, I hasten to send this news to you.

Begging God to grant you prosperity in all your endeavors, I am,

Your affectionate,

*Al. Card. Barnabo
Jean Simeoni, Secretary*

My dear Daughters, let us receive with gratitude and preserve piously this mark of sympathy which His Eminence the Cardinal Prefect of the Propaganda addressed to me yesterday:

Very Reverend Mother,

*I have learned with sorrow of the death of the Reverend Basil Moreau,
Founder and Superior General of the Institute of Holy Cross.*

Al. Card. Barnabo

Let us bless God in our affliction and let us console each other in prayer. Have this Circular Letter read in all houses at Spiritual Reading on the day it arrives. It shall be translated into English for our sisters who do not understand French.

Each superior or directress will acknowledge receipt of this letter.

Yours affectionately and devotedly in J.M.J.,

Sr. Mary of the Seven Dolors
Superior General

Sr. Mary of Egypt
Secretary General