



The Epiphany Letters of Cornelia

On the Feast of the Epiphany 1848 took place for the first time the ceremony of the Renovation of Vows. Reverend Mother and three of the Community, (the only Professed in the Society) publicly renewed their vows in Holy Mass, immediately before communicating. Our Mother on this occasion decided that an annual retreat of three days should be made in preparation for this renewal; which ceremony was always to take place throughout the Society on this day. This feast was for her, second only to that of Christmas. It brought with it an annual call to a renewal of self-sacrifice and detachment, a day on which each sister was to give not only her all to the Holy Child, but also to search the avenues of the heart, for any stumbling block, any undue attachment.

If the mother Foundress of the Society of the Holy Child Jesus could, with any truth, be called a "severe Superior", it was on this point alone; she was not only severe, but very severe. Love and affection were with her so sacred, that every attachment had to become detachment, unless it was centered in the Eternal Love. Every affection had to be purified, sanctified before it could be trusted, and then it would lead, and was to lead, to God. Whether the soul was to be saved in the world or in the cloister above all things the heart was to be trained in the great Christian law of Charity. No one knew this better than Mother Connelly, whose loving heart, ever in the crucible had passed through so fierce and fiery an ordeal. In every department she was vigilant.

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CC:VIII, 80 - 1851-52

(this letter has been copied from a little brown-paper-covered notebook . . . on the fly-leaf is written in Mother St. John McMaster's handwriting: Copies of Letters from Mother Foundress.)

Dear children in J.C.,

You have begged me to tell you what I most desire to see you grow and excel in. This day being the eve of Epiphany, our great feast of the year when we renew our vows, it may perhaps be well for me to comply with your request and give you a little remembrance for the year but in doing so I need only make use of the Saints and apply their words to you being far above any I could give you of my own. certainly I most ardently desire to see you closely united to God in prayer and in all your actions, that the example of each in every virtue may assist and encourage the other; and above all I would wish to see you excel in the perfection of charity and humility, and may you be free from all inordinate affections, subdued and mortified by the grace of God, and so composed especially in speaking, that nothing not even a single word may be observed in you that would not tend to the edification of all around you. I would also wish you to learn how to interchange severity and firmness with mildness and mercy, so as not to allow yourselves to be turned from what has been determined upon to be acceptable to God; and may you have the strength of mind to resist the weakness of many, not losing confidence by reason of contradictions nor suffering yourselves to be elevated by prosperity nor dejected by adversity, being prepared were it necessary, to submit eve

to death for the love and in the service of our dear Lord and Savior Jesus christ. Finally, I would wish to see you most illustrious in all the grace of virtue; but at least do not be wanting in an exemplary piety and probity and a sincere affection for the Community (I mean the Order), together with humility, I repeat it, which is the only safeguard pf all other virtues, true humility - also being especially the guardian of Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience. May the constant practice of this virtue grow and increase in you till it brings you to the perfection of Charity, and to the eternal enjoyment of the Beatific Vision.

Most dear Children in Xt
Yrs. unworthily,
C.

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January 6, 1854

My very dear sisters,

What better shall I say to you on Epiphany morning than the old salutation. Arise, trim your lamps and be no longer unfaithful but faithful. St. John was asked why he always said the same thing and he repeated again the same, "love one another", and St Francis of Sales "love God". That is how you will learn how to love Him so I repeat to you "Be faithful trim your lamps with the oil of fidenity especially by fidelity in little things." This is the cooperation with divine grace. This will ensure your perfection, and send you on to all that our Blessed Lord asks of you, and to the fulfillment of his designs upon each of you. Remember the work of each day: "My God to glorify, my Savior to imitate, my soul to save, eternity to prepare for!" What a soul in hell would give for this one day or hour to make a perfect act of contrition! I thank you all dearly for your nice presents - they are most dear to me because of their being the marks and the fruit of diligence. "By their works ye shall know them." Let all be diligent in giving proofs of love this year, and as you step on through the muddy streets, love God with your feet; and when your hands toil love Him with your hands; and when you teach children, love Him with His little ones; and thus may you be blessed in your actions and in your members with an abundance of Divine Love, and purified and prepared in this world, as far as possible, to enjoy an eternity of Love.

Pray for your unworthy servant in Christ,
C.C.

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January 5, 1856

My very dear Sisters and Novices,

You are expecting a few words from me on the Eve of Epiphany, and tho' I am very much fatigued, I must say three words to you. Which are the sweetest words I can find? Without much thought let us take those ever present to us in our Religious Life, Poverty-Chastity-Obedience.

These are sweeter than pages of ordinary expressions, since they embrace the whole perfection of the Gospel truths and Counsels of our Divine Lord, and are the foundation of our supernatural life. Yes, my dear sisters, you will find food for meditation every day and every hour throughout the whole year and for the rest of your life in those dear words, so that my letter will be very long in your hearts if your engrave therein, Poverty, Chastity, Obedience, as the sum of the pages my heart would dictat at this moment.

May these blessed counsels be fixed in your hearts, so that you may day by day

understand them more and more brightly, and love them more intensely, and practice them more diligently, not forgetting to cultivate their handmaids and attendant "angels", our old friends, though ever new, Vigilance, Humility and Fidelity.

These are the ever darling companions of our religious life, always ready to brighten the clouds of our natural defects, turning these defects even into some hidden treasures to be stored up for heaven, and at the same time bringing with them the strength of a hidden life in God; and it is in this obscurity from all human view that the Divine Light shines, and in this hidden life we are clothed with our coat of mail, that we may be enabled to right spiritually in the army of God's Church militant.

When we are seeking to know more of our dear Sisters, Poverty, Chastity and Obedience in their hidden virtues, let us turn to the great martyr St. John the Baptist and compare our very little sacrifices to his hidden life of penance and prayer, and let us bow down our heads at even the name of sacrifice when we think of ourselves. Whose standard have we chosen my dear sisters? - and who are we following? St John went before Him, and after a life of penance, suffered, humanly speaking, the most ignoble of deaths!

Let us never think we have done enough, but more and more try to imitate the faith of the great St. John. If you have faith you will learn the value of a suffering and hidden life, and it is to this life you are especially called by the very Name you bear.

Be then like the Holy Child Jesus in your thoughts, in your words, and in your actions cherishing diligence and fidelity in what is called little by daily occurrence - and be persuaded that nothing is little with God, if it is in the practice of virtue - God and I - Fidelity.

One word and I must finish. Remember that you all have three Superiors - God - your religious Superior - and your own conscience.

Make of your conscience a strict and watchful and diligent Superior, and you will be sure of finding in our Lord and in your religious Superior very gentle, loving, and forgiving Superiors - a blessing which I sincerely wish in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

I am always faithfully and lovingly
Yours in J.C.
Cornelia
SHCJ

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January 5, 1857

Ever Silent - Tranquil - Immutable Holy, Holy Holy Lord God
My Very dear Sisters in J.C.,

The eve of our dear epiphany feast warns me that you will expect a letter from me, if it contains but these lines.

You have made your dear retreat, and we are just finishing ours, and preparing for the renewal of our Vows ~~tomorrow morning~~. I need not recall to your minds the hidden treasures we are secretly to carry to our lovely Savior in His lowly manger, nor with what floods of devotion we are willingly to offer ourselves to be possessed by Him in the sweet bonds of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience, nor that like the Magi we are to follow the Star of Salvation by vigilance, humility and fidelity, encouraging ourselves and one another in the habit of prayer, recollection and constancy in the practice of all Christian virtues.

These are old and oft-repeated themes, and subjects of our daily intercourse - and yet they are ever new! What shall I say? Three sweet words - the first and the last. I should be inclined to say but one - Faith, but I must kiss the ring and say Faith, Hope and Charity and wish you all the full possession of the three theological virtues. If you practice these with perfect constancy you will become Saints; you are Saints already, but not sealed, till death proves your constancy.

May your stability prove true till constancy is dealt by death, and by a death which is quickly to introduce you to the Beatific Vision where you are to be filled with the joy of Heavenly Light and encompassed by the ecstatic delight of loving

God without interruption.

Now we must delight in Him by our homely actions of charity, and by our passive cooperation not resisting the love that would fill our poor hearts. Let us not resist, my dear Sisters for we are ourselves the only obstacle to the overflowing of His Divine Love.

I must not say more than that I am
Ever your devoted servant in J.C.,
[C.C.]

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1858

My dear Sisters in J.C.,

The eleventh Anniversary of the Epiphany must not pass without a few lines to wish you every blessing with the Manifestation of our dear Lord in your hearts.

One word only I will write you, and the definition of this word we shall talk over, as I expect to see you very soon, and this word in Attention. It is a very simple word, and used very often by worldlings in every class of life, perhaps more frequently than by religious, but when we apply it in a religious sense it speaks volumes and may be carried into every thought and deed. I beg of you all my dear Sisters to apply it in a religious sense each according to her devotional attrait and when I am with you we shall finish our letter, and you will give me your views about this common little word. May our dear Lord be with you on this Blessed Feast and accept the renewal of your Holy Vows by an abundant bestowal of His Grace - So that you may henceforth be so attentive to all the duties they imply that you may at all times be ready, as the wise virgins, to hear His word and faithful in corresponding to it.

Ever yours faithfully in the
Heart of the Holy Child
C.C.

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The Epiphany 1870
Hyerres, France

JMJ

My Very dear Sisters,

I said goodbye to you on the 2nd of the New Year, until today, when I need not assure you that you have been present in our hearts and our thoughts before the altar of God and in Holy Communion. May He Himself give you his choicest blessings, and enrich you with a constant flow of the graces of charity, or prayer, and of mortification, to which your correspondence throughout the year, I trust, may add that portion of 'compound interest' which will enrich the treasury of Heaven and store up for each one of you an eternity of blessings. And now for all the other wishes! I have so many for you that I must condense them into one - that you may renew your fervour every month, but more particularly at the Ember days when perhaps you will especially take St. Gertrude to assist you. Her beautiful Exercises contain the very spirit of the Holy Child and the sentiments of the Church in the Divine Office. It seems to me that as David was a man after God's own heart so was Gertrude the Virgin of His special choice and His Heart's sweet love. And a better model of acts of love it would be hard to find! Those who think her expressions too poetical of course will find the poetry of the Psalms too poetical and the Liturgy of the Church quite beyond them or their small hearts. Not so with you, my dear sisters, who will find the expressions of your own hearts which have perhaps not found words to suit them elsewhere. There is another little book that I must recommend you to take at Ember times in turn with the book of devotion on the Sacred Heart (Gautralet, etc., etc.), and this is also by a Jesuit Father, The Soul Contemplating God. Every Convent of the Holy Child has it if I remember aright. It is such a wee book for the pocket, and takes in the attributes of God so beautifully that all would relish it at least once a year. Besides this it embraces the great fundamental exercises of St. Ignatius and wonderfully dilates the

heart.

This morning we renewed our Vows in our sweet little chapel as usual, Mr. Fenton standing at the side and the ciborium uncovered before the Tabernacle, just as usual - and then Holy Communion! It was all very sweet. After Confession I asked M. le Cure whether the renewing of the Vows was a renewing of the innocence of Baptism the same as at the first saying, and he said yes he presumed so - and it would stand against all our sins for the last six months. Is it not a delicious thought for all of us after the six months' confession? Ah! what a good God we serve and how delicious it is to serve Him and to give Him again and again our body and soul and our heart's life.

What do you think has come to welcome the Epiphany of 1870? What - why nothing less than a box from America containing 6 copies of the translation of the Martyrology, - to be read in the refectory! Photographs of the Sisters and about $\frac{1}{2}$ doz. volumes that our dear ones thought would be valued by us all - Mother Lucy's ten pounds are already most acceptable. 100 francs have been appropriated to the good Cure for his Bonne Annee and the rest shall go for other equally charitable purposes of health, etc., etc., etc. We all thank her.

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The Convent Jan 5, 1878
St. Leonard's on Sea

JMJ

Very dear Sisters,

A happy, holy and joyful Epiphany to you each - and may you pass the most holy year of your lives in 1878.

May you correspond to the advice given by Fr. Balthazar in the "Hints to a Novice", given in the little Manual, especially in the practice of heroic virtue, by the hidden acts of your every day life - with only God to witness the crucifixion of the will and inclinations.

I am sure that you pray for me - I am on the mend, but still very ill - with hours of great prostration.

Ever your loving Mother in Xt.

C.C.