

Lenses Key:

Hospitality

Philippine the Immigrant – Seeing the New World for the First Time

Obstacles & Uncertainties

Evidence of Prejudice/Racism in 1818

Letter 94

L. 10 to Mother Barat¹

SS. C. J. et M.

New Orleans, June 7, 1818²

My very dear Mother,

The longer the time since God separated me from you, the more ardently I long for news of you and of those who are our fathers and mothers and sisters. As I am uncertain whether you have received the letters I wrote in the middle of May when we were near Cuba and also one from here to Mother Bigeu that I sent via Georgetown, I will go back a little from what I said in those two; it is customary to repeat when letters are sent by sea. The French consul promised to send our mail by a vessel sailing to Havre in a few days. Letters for Bordeaux will wait for the *Rebecca*, which leaves at the end of the month.

In my last letter, I noted the sad events at the beginning of the voyage. The beautiful weather that followed restored our health and finally came the joy of our arrival. Everything we saw fulfilled so many of our most earnest desires. Catherine, who had shown the most weakness, was therefore the happiest one to see the land; I beg you to ask Mother Prevost about this tearfulness that makes me fear harm to the tear ducts. Marguerite, calm, obedient and humble, savors the joy of her vocation; but I am afraid that her deafness, from which she suffered even in France, will limit her usefulness. Octavie has shown several signs of lack of experience, which have given rise to unfavorable comments actually expressed with contempt. During the voyage, her health was excellent, but as we neared land, she suffered palpitations and weakening of her sight. She said this was due to a blood condition that clouded her vision; she had the same problem in Grenoble. Eugenie is the only one who can do close work; both the sisters wear glasses. The fervor of this good religious has increased enormously. Overheating caused by the diet at sea brought on hemorrhoids and swollen ankles, but they have disappeared now. Only find out, if you please, whether something should be done about this.

I do not know whether we shall learn something about Saint Louis before I close this letter. The bishop does not write, which is hardly encouraging. I have met one wealthy man from that district who told us they are waiting with great impatience for both the college and the girls' boarding school, and that the college would be in Saint Louis and the boarding school three leagues away in a village called Florissant or Saint Ferdinand, in beautiful, healthy and fertile country. Apparently, there is no house available, but it is said that in that country construction is quick though not very solid; there is no question of using stone; all is

¹ In the present edition, letter 9 to Mother Barat is intentionally absent. It is an account of the Atlantic crossing, written by Eugenie Audé, not by Philippine Duchesne. Jeanne de Charry nevertheless included it in her collection (letter 93), while recognizing that it was not written by Philippine.

² Original autograph, C-VII 2) c Duchesne to Barat, Box 2. Cf. J. de Charry, II 1, L. 94, pp. 77-85; Hogg, pp. 52-58; Ch. Paisant, pp. 137-142.

made in brick and wood. In this house, for instance, all the dividing walls between cells and other rooms and even the roof are made of wooden planks. I have never seen such beautiful houses.

We are wonderfully treated in this house; they even want us to stay longer and have no fear of illness. These religious have had various things bought for us; they wanted to pay for them, saying we could settle with them later. We are always sure to receive, as a present, a piece of cloth worth fifty francs. The superior told me today that her house would always be our stopping place and that when more companions come to join us, they must choose a season that would allow them a longer rest here; she also wishes to look after all our business for Saint Louis.

I hope that in time we shall have many more establishments in this country, but it is essential to train both English and Spanish women. In Saint Louis, language and customs are more English than French. Here English is as common as French; nearly all the pupils speak both languages, and many of the parents, only English. No one could be better turned out or more amicable than the Creoles. Those of the "habitations" [large rural estates] are often neglected, but for the Americans in towns, education is first class. I saw a little ten-year old girl today whose schooling must end when she is twelve, but to keep her occupied up to her ability she is learning Latin; her twelve-year-old brother speaks and writes both languages, also Latin, and now he is studying Greek. He will come with us to Saint Louis. His mother, a true Mother of the Maccabees,³ is perfectly capable of teaching him herself, but she prefers to send him 400 leagues away to be sure he will be taught by holy priests. Father Martial is in charge of him. He already has three pupils and his Masses at five F. He is sorry about the man of whom I spoke to Mother Bigeu, a carpenter, gardener, baker, whom I promised I would help come to this country. He will perhaps love us better than him, feeling that he has been deserted. He would have suited us very well; Mother Vincent knows him and so does Father Barat.

The same merchant [Mr. Mullanphy] who comes from Saint Louis is leaving for Philadelphia; from there he will take his four of his daughters to France to place them in boarding schools for two years. They were all pupils here, and the eldest, who is over twenty, would like to become a religious. He does not want to leave her here with these nuns and says that she has to spend two years in France. I spoke to him about our house in Poitiers without settling anything. He seemed pleased with the discovery. Mother Grosier would do well not to refuse these girls if he takes them there. They are good girls, as rich as the father, who in his will has provided for an income of 10,000 F so that they will not have to ask anything of a guardian in case of his death. Someone has just spoken to me of two other sisters who are also going to France.

The Ursulines, who have recently made a foundation in Havana, are now going to Puerto Rico.⁴ It is easy to make foundations with the Spanish. These nuns in Havana have received 125,000 F. from the bishop, 30,000 in a collection in two days and 300,000 F. as dowry of one of their members.

I believe that we will find everything necessary for clothing. Black cloth is common and not expensive, likewise cotton and other materials; these nuns have found good bargains in times of plenty. But the Americans' taking of Pensacola from the Spanish following a war with neighboring Indians has caused all prices to go up suddenly.⁵

³ The mother of the seven brothers suffered martyrdom (2 Macc chapter 7).

⁴ The Ursulines, who had been in New Orleans since 1727, made the foundation in Havana in 1803. Puerto Rico and Cuba were then Spanish colonies.

⁵ During these years, the Americans had invaded the Spanish territory of the Floridas, where Pensacola was the westernmost city. In 1821, the United States purchased Florida from Spain.

Do not forget, dear Mother, the school rule, the plan of studies, the astronomy text, an atlas, breviaries, the formula for final vows, the Summary of the Constitutions, the verses on geography, the poem on Religion, Esther.

Answers required:

- 1) Regarding the admission of colored children to the boarding school or to the Society, there will have to be separation, as we have vowed to give instruction to the colored people, and the white people do not want to associate with them.
- 2) Enclosure can be secured only by wooden planks and hedges. If we possess land, how can we look after it?
- 3) I have asked if we do not state that postulants may come to ordinary recreations, how can we get to know them? And at great distances from novitiates, that benefactors be not excluded from coming in; that there be a method for accusations and conferences.
- 4) That we employ enslaved persons in service only with extreme caution; they are unreliable in important matters. However, God has his own everywhere.
- 5) If you send us a sister to be the gardener, it is useless to entrust costly goods to her. The essential is 1) stockings – the sole can be changed – leather gloves to guard against mosquito bites; 2) a small mosquito net; 3) she must know how to make soft shoes; 4) she must have very light clothing for the part of the voyage in the Tropics and on the river with long sleeved chemises; 5) she will need bouillon cubes or bottles of consommé to make broth with hot water when she is sick; these can be bought in Bordeaux for three F. 6) a coffee pot to heat water with a lamp; peppermint drops, sweet wine. It is so necessary to have means of refreshment. I had laughed at all the provisions we were made to bring along, but nothing was superfluous. A syringe is also very necessary for those who need it.

I inquire often and nothing has arrived from France; the answer is always a cruel “No.” How we long for news from you!

Every day we expect the boat from Saint Louis; but part of our belongings are still locked up in the ship. The sisters went yesterday to pick up our beds, etc. The nuns’ wagon with five Negroes (who do the work of one) went with them. When they appeared, there was general rejoicing. The sailors greeted them eagerly. The cook, in spite of his shrunken body after thirty years in the army, rushed to offer them a seat; in fact, all vied with one another to see who could best receive them. The captain’s little boy ran to Sister Catherine with tears in his eyes; she had often looked after his cuts and bruises. And Carlin, his pretty little dog, more amiable than Tobit’s,⁶ jumped and welcomed them with dancing steps. The captain was not there, but he had said he had never had such pleasant passengers. Not wishing to exaggerate, I did not tell him I would never forget him, but that I would always remember the *Rebecca*. That seemed to please him.

Our hostesses are worried about our journey. If they had their way, we would travel at a low cost. I would not be surprised if they contribute to the cost. I am in real difficulty, as I cannot count on the 10,000 F. sent through Philadelphia. If a building has been undertaken or purchased, this sum may have already been spent. I ought not to be astonished at the strokes of Providence. French money, which can be acquired with difficulty, is practically worthless here. If you ever make a foundation here, there must be a rich benefactor on

⁶ Tob 11:9.

the spot; otherwise, you will be ruined. The Ursulines told me that the voyage of the eight religious who came from France eight years ago cost 21,000 F. (It is true that they spent five months in Baltimore.) Only four of those eight remain. And those who came last year, before we did, cost 15,000, including their stay in Bordeaux. Sometimes it is possible to obtain leave to make one's own meals aboard ship, and that is cheaper; that is what Mr. de Marseuil did. Sometimes poor people get a free passage by working on the ship. These are not admitted to the saloon or the dining room.

At my astonishment that only Negroes are employed in menial tasks in this country, while so many people are dying of hunger in France, I was told that they are preferred in spite of their bad habits. White people are spoiled both as to work and to equality. Asserting, "We have the same skin as you," they all acquire the right to be "gentlemen." Here is a surprising example that affected me deeply. These religious, who want to do everything for us, arranged to have our clothes washed at their expense by their Negroes. I gave Catherine a small amount to do in the same room. After several difficulties, she came to tell me that she did not like working alongside the Negro women, that here white people did not do so. I answered that Negroes also have souls, redeemed by the same sacred Blood and received into the same church, and that if she was not willing to work with them, she had better take passage on a ship returning shortly, since we came here for the Negro. She was so unreasonable that she did not recover her good humor until evening.

I understand that we may be here for a long time. Father Martial is going into the countryside for a fortnight.

I am asking [Mr. Jouve] in Lyon to do a service for our kind religious whose goodness to us is overwhelming. They are expecting a priest and three nuns who will leave France in September. If you could provide them with a pretty, embroidered flounce for an alb, I would be so grateful. They do not have any here.

Reverend Mother, the paper is at an end. Another ship leaves at the end of the month. It will repeat that I am your unworthy but obedient daughter.

Philippine