

New Orleans¹
 Begun July 9, 1818

SS. C. J. et M.

Very Reverend Mother,

This is the fifth time I have written to you since our arrival, and I calculate with pain that it will be a long time before we get an answer. The *Gustavus* brought me some of your letters that were rather old, also two from your brother and our picture of the Sacred Heart. Mrs. Fournier included in the same consignment a small packet for the bishop that she did not declare, therefore, we cannot withdraw the consignment from the customs office. The government in Washington has made such strict rules that the inclusion of a single object found in a package and not declared means confiscation of everything, to the profit of the officials. At this moment, they are holding back a piece of cloth because a box worth fifteen *sols* was not included on the form. One lady has had all her luggage held back because it contained a few dolls that were not declared. These laws are quite new but are followed to the letter; I beg you, therefore, to make this fact known every time something is sent. All articles of different kinds must be declared; for example, *a box marked (certain address) containing sewing needles, embroidery silk, gold lace of such and such value; a bale of cloth for vestments, such and such a price; supplies for different kinds of needlework, etc.*

No duty is paid on objects carried by the passenger, but information must always be given so that they are allowed to pass, for example, *used linen and habits for women*. Things for the school are not subject to duty, therefore, books for study and other school effects: material for needlework, maps, globes etc., cost nothing, but they must be marked: *For the House of Instruction of Saint Louis*. Nothing will be opened. However, nothing should be inserted that requires duty, since it would be confiscated if they happened to open the package. Some of the customs officers are lenient; others with the [penetrating] eyes of an Argos are adamant. I sent them Mrs. Fournier's letter so that they could see that we were unaware of the packet put in with our picture, which, moreover, being of a devotional nature, did not tempt them much. We hope to get the picture by Sunday, the day we leave here; it was to be tomorrow. Our luggage only is already on the steamboat for Saint Louis; we have not unpacked anything. Everything arrived in good condition; we are using only what we had in our small bags. Each week these religious have had our clothes washed. We have bought some light cotton dresses, black with one white thread running through the goods. (The doctor and the religious insisted on this measure.) The sisters have purple, almost black, cotton dresses. We wore our religious habit on the ship, and no one took offence; on the contrary, several said it was well chosen and could offend no one in the world. The Ursulines, even those who have come in the last thirty years, have travelled in secular dress; we shall have to do so to some extent on the steamboat. We shall also be unable to gather for Mass and confession and such.

Father Martial is being kept here for various important reasons. Our companion from Father Liotar's is coming with us; some distance on the way we shall pick up another priest; we have been warned not to approach him, as he is very scrupulous. Lately he was traveling in a ship that was sinking; he did not even notice it or the fright and general disorder because he was saying his Office; they were obliged to force him to get into a boiler, which kept him afloat. Another time a priest traveled seven leagues to go to confession to him but had to return unshriven because the priest was saying his Office and refused to be disturbed.

Father Martial would like to come to Saint Louis soon; he has sent all his luggage in advance and has put it entirely in our charge. He is beginning to find us not such a responsibility (I am almost angry at this). Our fathers in France cannot be forgotten. I asked him to write a word to you; I do not know whether he did it, but he was not pleased at my request, saying he had no complaints to make and that as for praise, it would be obvious this had been asked for. He reprimanded me for what I told you about Catherine; and when I told him we had to report everything, he replied: "Yes, in due time, when you are able to write the good with the

¹ Original autograph, C-Vii 2) c Duchesne to Barat, Box 2. Cf. J. de Charry, II, L. 98, pp. 100-109; Hogg, pp. 68-75; Ch. Paisant, pp. 152-158.

bad; at these distances one should not give an unfavorable impression that cannot be undone.” I tell you this so you will ignore what I say that is due to my rigid character.

He shows himself very fatherly towards us and has not abandoned us for confessions. I admit I skipped going to him three or four times,² for there is an Italian priest here, kindly as Father Perreau, pious, loving the Society, whose soul is as noble as his birth; Eugenie says he comes from one of the most illustrious families in Florence. He has shown great interest in us, and I suspect that he gave part of the 1500 francs that we are to be given on leaving for the unknown costs of our journey. The reverend superior of this house will present them saying modestly that she is responsible for only 500 francs; but how many other things do we not owe to her generosity: medicine, crockery, a gross of plates, remedies, material, candles, laundry and food, which, if calculated at the same price asked of the pupils, would come to 1500 francs in silver, and if the gifts for our establishment were counted, at least 3000 francs. It would be even more had it included the cost of lodgings, doctors in the city, etc.

When I mention the doctor, do not be anxious; it is true he thought at one moment that I had scurvy, but he was mistaken. I am in better health than I have been for a year; that is to say, I am perfectly well. I brave the sun and the humidity, the spicy and salty food customary in this country, which they think you must take to give tone to the stomach, which becomes sluggish in this damp heat. Marguerite has a slight case of hemorrhoids; the doctor thinks it is better for her for them to be stabilized, and he wants to bring them on. Eugenie has had them for the third time since leaving France and his advice, on the contrary, for her is to control them by cold baths. Octavie is well; her pains and palpitations are felt less often; she has a rash caused by the heat, and she is being treated for it; Catherine also, she is the one who will be the least accustomed to the climate, because between real or imaginary illness, there will always be something wrong; at present she is not showing fear, but in the future: wind, the failure of the steamboat, fire that can break out, contagion, all these build up and prevent sleep; work in the kitchen heats and harms the sight; active occupations cause the legs to swell. Mother Prevost would have rendered us a service by warning us of all these things; you would have given me [Marie] Berthé;³ it is important to have someone for the more practical, menial tasks to avoid using the Negroes who do practically nothing.

But why should I be thinking of the future with apprehension, since at the present moment Providence is always for us and our mission? Not one of the vessels involved has had an accident for a hundred years, whereas accidents are so frequent. The *Paterson*, which left a little after we did, perished near the Windward Islands in the Antilles; happily, the passengers and part of the cargo were saved, but details are not known. The *Rebecca*, in spite of bad weather, fire, an encounter with a fearsome corsair, suffered nothing while we were aboard; when she was going out of the river, she was pillaged by pirates; they took 40,000 francs from a passenger. I do not know what happened to our many letters and the parcel containing handiwork of the Indians, which I sent to your good brother for you.

As I am unsure whether you have received my requests, I repeat them here: the timetable of the boarding school, Plan of Studies, book of astronomy, poem of religion, geography by Gathis, forms of greetings, our office books, geographical verse, atlas, red ribbons of merit, small globes and spheres. Ships often come here from Le Havre, and if Mrs. de Rollin gave you an address to send goods going out or to receive those coming in, this would be more advantageous than sending everything via Bordeaux. I do not know how we shall manage with the Plan of Studies of France; can we follow the same plan with students in classes with sixteen-year-old children who know neither how to read nor to pray to God and others, eight years old, who speak both languages perfectly? Here reading is a priority: for English readers to extend their range, for the French with a language mixed with Spanish, Creole or Negro; there are five languages in use at the school.

In spite of many difficulties, I am thinking seriously of an establishment in New Orleans. The Ursulines with singular disinterestedness are most eager for this and would not let us down. They stressed especially the lateness of the arrival of the steamboat, the bishop's silence, the impossibility of acquiring funds for the rest of our voyage, fearing that the 10,000 francs already sent have been spent without our knowing for what purpose and by whom. Finally, the needs of the city and the drop in income of the greater number

² She went to confession to a priest other than the habitual confessor.

³ Marie Berthé assisted Philippine in setting up the motherhouse on the Rue des Postes in Paris in 1815-1816.

present difficulties. They added that there are many people in the city saying that we must stay. I opposed these wishes with the following: 1. Our mission is for Saint Louis. 2. The air. 3. Our vocation for the Indians, etc. 4. The small number to begin in a large city. They answered: 1. That it was almost impossible to begin in Saint Louis at the moment because nothing was ready. 2. The voyage was dangerous in the hot season. 3. That there were plenty of Indians, Negroes and mulattos here, 4. That several people were working in education with fewer means and managed their business very well; that we should not offer ourselves but wait until we are asked; that there was a fund ready for such an establishment; that there were not enough churches here; we would ensure that one more was built in a suburb where it is healthier; it would be at a distance from the Ursulines, but since we both keep enclosure, that was no problem. We could come to an understanding about our taking boarders; that when theirs diminished in number, there would be no problem; they would take more day pupils. 5. That it was absolutely necessary to have a house here that would be the center for all those we might have in America; that the noviceship would be better in this center, a city where there is an abundance of everything and where one meets people from the four corners of the world; that if the cold climate of Saint Louis did not agree with certain people, they could come here, and vice versa, as needs arose. 6. Lastly, they made it very clear that they welcomed us and all those who would come later, but it might happen that it would no longer be possible, etc. etc.

I felt the force of these arguments. I have always been in opposition to the will of God being indicated for Saint Louis. Father Martial thinks the same. He asks for no repayment for all he has paid out for our baggage or dues on the ship. At last the steamboat from Saint Louis has arrived; there was no letter either for Father Martial or for us, but the bishop again recommends us to these religious and says that he has promised a house with garden and orchard where we can function on our arrival, which is awaited with impatience.

I interrupt myself to tell you that we have the picture of the Sacred Heart in our hands. And so we are leaving.

All the thoughts that were for staying in New Orleans have disappeared as also those for Havana. We see the will of God in this.

However, I am so touched by the strength of the reasons that make an establishment of our Society desirable in this city, that I ask this of you for the following spring.⁴ I shall say a word to the bishop and to the consul of France, if I can see them before leaving this city; I will send you their reply and hope you will not put the small number of subjects as an objection. As nothing is going ahead in France, we must work elsewhere, and fulfill so many promises for these countries. I am so happy to have come here that new sacrifices made in order to extend our apostolate will not be felt; whether it means facing the terrors of the sea anew or crossing the least frequented forests. I seem to be ready. I am only envious of Father Martial, who has more work than he can cope with, while we are living in idleness.

Women religious in this country should be a great body rarely seen, lest they scandalize the Americans who are very reserved and not very indulgent towards our sex. They even say that it would be very difficult to remain in New Orleans without grilles, but I do not agree. New Orleans is corrupted by the influx of foreigners. They increase daily; we have seen more than twenty vessels in two days, but what good needs to be done! All these little mulattos, Negroes, Creoles, even white people follow Father Martial like sheep; there are three numerous catechism classes each day. And the girls would be the same if they were given the chance. That is why I come back to my request for an establishment here. Is Mother Rivet not willing to come? At her age, it is easier to get acclimated. Mother Thevenin has asked to come. The life here is fitting for her, and her gentleness, education and facility for languages would be most useful. Great learning is not needed; more in Saint Louis perhaps, for the Americans are less frivolous than the Creoles.

You could consider Eugenie as a superior; I think you would have nothing to fear. She is mature, does everything with wisdom and in the presence of God. The difficulty is that she would be too young for the big city; and if Octavie were left in the North, as seems necessary for English, which she understands better, and for the studies, still more for her temperament and the character of the inhabitants, less corrupt than here where there is always a tendency to speak and interpret others' words in an evil way, I do not think she will ever acquire the experience necessary to be in charge or even to have much contact with people from

⁴ The foundation in New Orleans would be made only in 1867

outside. Her excellent character and her humility will help her to work under a younger person. We would have great need of a good domestic and one or two sisters like Agatha [Gauthier].⁵

Forgive all the mistakes in my letter, good and respected Mother. I have been constantly interrupted by the preparations for our departure, and I have neither time nor paper to begin again (the supply of thin paper is exhausted, that is to say, what we had for the voyage; the rest is still packed away in our baggage. Here it costs two *sols* a sheet.)

These sisters are also very concerned to provide us with everything; one of them cleaned our mouths like a dentist; another brought us fifty pounds of coffee and sugar; the superior, a purse of 15,000 francs. All this has not distracted me from you, and my greatest pleasure is to write to you; but all these gifts deserve some recognition and still greater gratitude to the charitable people who treat us so well.

In spite of all the distractions of a departure and the uncertainty of events and the punishments that I have reason to expect, I see my past; I realize how much pain I have cost you, and I am now at your knees to receive forgiveness.

⁵ Her ardent desire for the missions of America was never realized.