

SS. C. J. et M.

Saint Louis, August 22, 1818¹

Very Reverend Mother,

We are close to 3000 leagues away from you, yet I am always near you in my desire to conform to your intentions and to follow your ideas. But at this vast distance, one can only groan sometimes seeing how we are overtaken by events, which deny us the possibility of receiving light from you.

Here we are at our third temporary halt since leaving Paris. Bordeaux and New Orleans left us with no regret except the delay in achieving our ultimate happiness; Saint Louis, where we hoped to stay, is our third encampment. We are in a very respectable house where we are getting to know our first boarders. We leave here in a week's time to go to Saint Charles, where our establishment will begin in a rented house. The bishop is to take us there and stay for a time to settle us in himself. Today he was kind enough to hear our confessions, and he said he regretted that he was unable to keep us in Saint Louis where there is not one room to rent. He made us see the great advantage of going to Saint Charles, which he thinks will be one of the most important cities in North America. It is on the Missouri; the banks are more populated every day, and one of the new states of the Federal Republic is to be named after it.² Not a day passes without four or five families with all their baggage passing through to settle in territories that are growing at an astonishing rate. And if a plan is carried out to build a canal connecting with New York through the Ohio and the Mississippi, our communications with France would be quicker than through New Orleans.

We departed on the steamboat *Franklin*, on July 12 and arrived only today, August 22, that is, the boat arrived. However, I left the boat on the evening of the 21st with Octavie, as we were only a mile away. The captain accompanied us to meet the bishop who welcomed us kindly and took us himself to the lodging that his fatherly kindness had arranged for us. He will give us as chaplain a priest who knows your brother, Father Barat, very well; it is thought that he was with the fathers. His name is Father [Benedict] Richard.³ The bishop promises to come often to Saint Charles and says that it is a morning's journey.

Even though Sainte Genevieve is a little bit farther, I proposed that he place us there. When the steamboat arrived there, the parish priest, a native of this country but educated by the Sulpicians in Canada, came to see us, bringing a carriage to take us to his house for Mass and breakfast. The captain did not allow him enough time. He was very distressed and said he had asked the bishop to send us to his parish, that he loved sisters, that he been brought up by them in Canada, that there were more than forty young women who would run to the steamboat to see us if only they had known we were there, etc. etc. This visit consoled us; we seemed to be listening to a father and an apostle; he fulfills the difficult duties of a parish of two hundred leagues all alone. He told us that the Indians of this part of the country still remember the Jesuits and are happy to see priests, have their children baptized and have them bless the crosses they wear, but that nevertheless he does little among them and among the Negroes. What can be done with such a dearth of priests, while throughout the States Protestant ministers abound, even among Catholics, and are paid and supported, even among the Indians?

At New Madrid, a village on our route almost completely French, more than 150 persons have not had the ceremonies of baptism; they are in only civil marriages, have not made their First Communion and go to the Methodist church to hear moral teaching, so they say. At Kaskaskia, another small village with a large church, the pastor of another parish comes only every two weeks, He is old and cannot give instruction. The Catholics have no instruction at all, so they go to a Protestant school and learn to read only English. The district will become increasingly only English speaking and Protestant as to religion, if no help is forthcoming.

¹ Original autograph, C-VII 2) c Duchesne to Barat, Box 2. Cf. J. de Charry, II 1, L.101, pp. 134-139; Hogg, pp. 91-95; Ch. Paisant pp. 173-176.

² The state was admitted to the Union in 1821.

³ Benedict Richard, OSB, arrived in Louisiana in 1817 and ministered in Saint Louis and Saint Charles before becoming chaplain to the Ursulines in New Orleans. He died in 1833 during a cholera epidemic.

More and more settlers are from cities on the east coast, Swiss, Germans, etc.

The bishop says we must wait for a foundation in New Orleans, that the Ursulines are already distressed, that the town is in danger of losing the faith (if the good already done by Father Martial is not sustained). As for Sainte Genevieve, he says it is losing land every day because the Mississippi is eroding the riverbank, that it has no commerce and no hope of having any, whereas the Missouri is becoming an increasingly rich country. In fact, you will see in the diary, which will be sent from New Orleans, that from Natchez, 100 leagues north of New Orleans as far as the Ohio, rather close to Sainte Genevieve, on the left bank there are only woods, inhabited by Indians, and on the right bank more woods broken up by a few poor dwellings; neither river bank has stone with which to build nor anyone to cut back the woods. At the approach to the Ohio, one sees Kentucky on the left bank, and on the right, there are several villages. The scenery changes completely, no longer a uniform green curtain of trees, often impenetrable, but rocks, pleasant hills, more houses, flocks and crops. In Kaskaskia, surrounded by Indians, we saw Catholics who work and live in the village and go to the church we visited. The chief of the Illinois and the princesses came to the riverbank to see the steamboat, which had never before been seen on this tributary, which has the same name as the village. Our steamboat went up this river to deliver merchandise. The chief and the princesses were on horseback with their attendants. They were dressed in embroidered garments and, seen from a distance, did not seem at all ridiculous; in fact, they presented an imposing and interesting sight.

The diary will note other incidents. Our only wish is that you have no fears on our account. You knew that we should have much to put up with, but the example of our holy bishop, who could have had a brilliant career in Paris but instead chose poverty and hard work, is enough to encourage us. Before we left the ship and entered the land we were to inhabit, I reread the words of Deuteronomy, a text that had previously made a deep impression on me: "*Audi, Israel; tu transgredieris hodie Jordanem... Ne dicas in corde tuo... propter justitiam meam introduxit me Dominus in terram, hanc possidendam... Observa et cave, nequando obliviscaris Domini Dei tui et negligas mandata ejus atque judicia et ceremonias quas ego praecipio tibi hodie.*"⁴

Such is our resolution: may God bless it. I am more and more convinced that Sister Eugenie has the qualities required for employments involving relationships with people from outside; I have thought of asking you to name her assistant instead of Octavie; but latterly I have begun to fear harming the one by a secret elevation and the other by discouragement. However Octavie has been both cheerful and amiable during our last voyage; and she is useful, as she has learned the most English, but she does not yet know enough for our needs. The bishop is sending us a convert from Protestantism from Philadelphia; she has a vocation and speaks English.

Please, I beg you to think of sending us [coadjutrix] sisters. The Negroes and the whites are all equal here, as in New Orleans. Catherine clings to the idea of teaching, yet she knows nothing about it. I no longer have a place for her.

I throw myself at your feet together with my sisters to be blessed by our loving mother.

Philippine

I cannot think how we are going to manage with the studies together with English and so many difficulties. Please give my regards to our fathers, mothers and sisters. We were hoping to find letters from you here; we have been very disappointed.

[On the reverse:]

To Mother
Mother Barat
Superior General of the Ladies of the Sacred Heart
Rue des Postes, N°40
Paris

⁴ "Listen, Israel..." Dt 4:1, 6:4 Jos 1:11 Dt 9:4, 8:11.