



### Letter to the missionaries of Equatorial Africa (30th November 1884)

My dear Sons,

I am writing today to all the mission posts in Equatorial Africa, and I do this for two reasons. Firstly, so that you do not think I have forgotten you or that my fatherly affection for you has diminished. In spite of the distance and in spite of the sometimes lengthy silences we maintain between us, I, for my part, am always greatly interested in all that happens to you.

It is this interest itself which is the second reason for my letter. In fact, I must inform you that the charitable works of propaganda, especially those of the Propaganda of the Faith, are reducing your grants year by year. This year, the Holy Childhood has refused to give us any help. A small charity, the Œuvre de Catéchisme, is offering us its help for the ransoming of African children; this, it is true, will never amount to very much, but you know that little streams become great rivers and missionaries cannot afford to disregard any help.

Well, the reason for the drop in interest people are showing in you, and with that the drop in our resources, is that your written contacts are simply not frequent enough or not interesting enough. You are content with writing diaries and journals which are often extremely boring because of their dryness. It is really the details and especially the picturesque and historical details, which our readers want to see in your different annals. This is what I am writing to you all today to ask you very urgently. Each time the opportunity arises for you to relate some important event, of whatever nature it may be, apostolic, tragic, even humorous, do not let it pass by, make it the topic of a complete report, giving all the details. You must share this work out between you. There are three of you in each mission post. To ask for a letter of this kind from each of you every three months is surely not too much to ask. But here, that would give us one letter a month, which is enough to nourish and sustain the interest of readers and their charity.

What touches readers most is the story of your ransomed children. You would need to take down a detailed account of the story of each one of these when they come to you. How he was captured, the journey he made, what sufferings he had to undergo, how you were able to snatch him from the hands of his kidnappers, his first impressions of being with you, the first progress he has made. For these re-

ports, you will, of course, choose the stories of those children whose circumstances are rather special. If, thereafter, in your orphanages, some other more interesting aspects come to light, you must make a note of them and include them in your correspondence. I say the same thing for your neophytes. But do remember, what people are interested are the details.

Here, I am pleading your case, because if you allow yourselves to be forgotten you will die of hunger and of thirst and be deprived of all resources. This is what I can see happening, if things continue as they are. So, I beg the superiors of each of the mission posts, and even expressly order them if necessary, to see that these letters intended for the public be written every three months by each and every missionary priest. They need not bother too much about the style, this will be corrected here. But, I say this once again, what is wanted is detail, interesting and informative detail. These letters must be addressed directly to me at Archbishop's House in Algiers, and they will reach me here. They must be quite separate from any official correspondence sent to the superiors. I shall then see to it that they are made to produce fruit.

Farewell, my dear Sons. I shall not give you any news because your superiors and your confreres are giving you news already. I have been quite ill once more; I even received Extreme Unction. But the Lord does not want me, it seems, even in purgatory, and he is leaving me still here on earth. I am not complaining, since I can still have the opportunity to be of service to you through the fatherly affection which I keep for all of you. I take this opportunity to remind you of the practice of baptising non-Christian children who are in danger of death. You seem not to care about this at all. In fact, this is one of the most beautiful and most fruitful practices, leading to heaven. Missionaries who forget this seem not to have lost their faith.

