



1867: The decree appointing Lavigerie as Archbishop of Algiers is made public.

1878: Felix Charmetant submits to the Dicastery for Evangelization the text for the establishment of missionaries at St. Anne of Jerusalem.

Circular letter to the Missionaries (14th January 1882)

I am writing to you from Carthage, only a few steps away from where Saint Cyprian suffered death. He is surely one of the great martyrs. Yet he never stopped seeking to avoid danger until the day he felt his conscience committed to raising up the faith of his flock by the testimony of his blood.

You must do likewise, my dear Sons. I do not know the circumstances which led our three missionaries to undertake their journey to Ghât. They were surely given assurances which enabled them to believe there was no imminent danger and to think that the ban I had imposed on them a year ago no longer applied. Well, it is not they I am addressing. From now on, I can only speak to them to bless them and to pray to them. It is to you and to your superiors in particular that I give this advice through my fatherly concern. There are now ten of you who, in less than six years, have shed their blood in the interior of our poor Africa not counting those who have died of illness and exhaustion. The experiences of the past must serve to temper the zeal of their successors and make them more patient!

My dear Sons, how happy is the Society of apostolic men who, in these times of universal cowardice and selfishness, needs to be stopped from rushing towards martyrdom! Such a generous attitude is worthy of the admiration of men and blessings from God. But as for me, I should be lacking in my duties as father and pastor if I did not curb this enthusiasm and insist, even under pain of sin if necessary, that you do not willingly expose yourselves to certain danger. I did this for the last group of those who set out on the road to Equatorial Africa. I have decided to do this henceforth for all. There will be only too many times when all the caution in the world will still not suffice; but we shall at least, you and I, have fulfilled our duty.

Now let us be generous enough to triumph over our sadness. We must weep, of course, you for your brothers and me for my sons, sons so worthy of my

respect and my tenderness but we must rejoice especially that their death is like the dawn of a better future for such a fallen race.

I have asked you to sing the great hymn of thanksgiving. May it truly burst out from your hearts. I have recited it before you and was particularly moved by the feelings it placed upon my lips. Taste its sweetness for yourselves. Praise God for linking your brothers with the noble choir of the apostles! Praise him for having crowned with martyrdom their life of innocence and purity! Praise him that through their devotedness they are the honour of the Church, our Mother, and of their country which is ours! *Te gloriosus Apostolorum chorus, Te Martyrum candidatus laudat exercitus, Te per orbem terrarum sancta confitetur Ecclesia.*

Alas, we are all in need of mercy and forgiveness. Let us ask Our Lord that this blood poured out for love of him might blend with his and be for us a source of expiation and justice. Let us conclude by asking mercy upon that poor African race accursed for so long and for whose salvation we have dedicated ourselves. Do not let us be troubled by difficulties and dangers. You have undertaken this work in the name of God. May your hearts rise up to Him to ask Him to affirm your hopes. Let us recall that saying of the great African Doctor: The blood of the martyrs is the seed of Christians 8. May it strengthen, now more than ever, our indomitable hope.

I join with you, once more, my dear Sons, in offering my thanks and my prayers and it seems to me that from the heights of heaven our martyrs are joining me in this. It is there that we shall join them one day where, as Saint Paul writes, everything we have suffered will be only a dream which passes in the blessed eternity of heaven.

