1879: Death of Father Girard, Lazarist, superior of the major seminary of Algiers. His zeal gave rise to the first missionary vocations.

Allocution pronounced on Good Friday, 19th April 1889, in Algiers Cathedral

Given the responsibility, as I am by the Holy See, of pleading the cause of the poor African slaves, I thought that nothing was more likely to appeal to your pity for their sufferings than to place them, today, under the protection of the memory of the Passion of the Saviour… They, too, these slaves, continue their painful passion, delivered over to vile torturers who hunt them on all sides like wild beasts, who subject them to the most atrocious tortures, to captivity, to the shame of a nameless debauchery, to death. I know what one could say about the sad degradation where they have fallen during so many centuries of barbarism; but I also know that nothing can justify the frightful sufferings they endure. Should they even be capable, moreover, of the brute behaviour that their oppressors attribute to them, we would have to say again of them, as Our Lord did: "O God, forgive them, they do not know what they are doing!"

Remember, My Very Dear Brothers, what I have just been revealing to Europe. Since about a quarter of a century ago, more than twenty million victims have been delivered into slavery and to the most horrible death. When I drew the picture, following the accounts of explorers and missionaries, I roused horror everywhere. I have been able to calculate, following eyewitness accounts, that two million human creatures disappear in this way every year. Do you hear that, My Very Dear Brothers? Two million men, creatures of God like us, that is to say, about five thousand Blacks, massacred, captured, sold, each day, if one counts the victims of all of Africa (Equatorial, East Africa, Western and Eastern Sudan, Morocco). That is still not enough. Massacre and fire are everywhere. It is the destruction of a whole continent. And yet, despite the cries of indignation of all that merited, on earth, the name of man and that of Christian, these horrors continue and multiply.

O God, has history ever seen such an excess of infamy? And if I wanted to say all, if one day I wanted to unmask the hypocrisy, the names which hide themselves, the cowardice, the impious calculations, the ambition of the one, the inhuman indifference of the other; what a cry of horror and condemnation in the civilized world! There, then, for an entire unfortunate race, is the cruel Passion of the Saviour truly renewed. All its elements are found there. I could point them out one by one. Nothing is missing, neither the Herods, nor the Pilates, nor the Judas, nor the cruelty of the scourging, nor the cowardly insults, nor the cross.

Never has anything in such abominable proportions been seen. In Jerusalem, Calvary was the summit of a hill. It bore only three crosses. In Africa, it is an immense continent. Blood is flowing everywhere, from the veins of millions of Blacks, mixed with the tears of mothers whose children are massacred before their eyes. Cruel abandonment is practised, deliberately, even shamefully preached by some who hold that one can allow to continue, without feeling disturbed, something that has been going on for so many centuries and who are not ashamed to declare it to the world! In the African interior, the cry of despair of Calvary arises from every breast: "Why are we abandoned?" And, sadder still, we begin to detect, even in the heart of Europe, greed, debauchery, hatred ready to join forces for the continuation of this long martyrdom. In their own way, that is what not only the Muslims of Turkey are doing, but those moreover who have undertaken to defend slavery, for love of gold, or perhaps out of opposition to our faith. Their lies, their stories, their sophisms seem to defy shame, in order to reconstitute, as one saw in the struggles at the beginning of this century, the infamous Party of the Slavers.

Such, then, my Very Dear Brothers, are the sentiments and the thoughts which must fill your hearts and mine, at this moment, as we hold before us the memory of the Passion of Calvary and of the Passion of Africa. If the use of force is not yet possible for us or if political jealousies oppose our action, prayer remains for us. It does not know obstacles. It is free, like our faith, and finds the way everywhere to reach the very heart of the God of Calvary. Let us all together, then, make it resound beneath the vaults of this church. They are draped in black to remind us not just of the Passion of the Saviour, but also of the death that hangs over Africa and of the destructions that threatens it.