



### First Instructions to Missionaries of Equatorial Africa (March 1878)

My dear Children,

Just when you are going to leave us to undertake the sublime and laborious Mission to which God is calling you, I feel my fatherly affection redouble for you, if it were possible. I prostrate myself in spirit before Our Lord, the Master of Apostles and the strength of Martyrs, praying him to bless you, to enlighten you and direct you himself and to take you body and soul into his holy protection.

To these prayers, which I shall renew and have renewed for you, daily, I wish to add some special recommendations that seem to me necessary to guide your inexperience. I wish also to give you a new indication of the interest, which I have in the success of such an important Mission, along with the Holy Apostolic See and the entire Catholic Church.

I. It is natural enough that I should want to begin by speaking to you of your spiritual dispositions both now and for the future, for everything else, absolutely everything, depends on that; you will convert nobody, you will not sanctify a single soul unless you yourselves first undertake to work steadfastly at your own sanctification.

I am not going into details here about your spiritual observances; they have no place in instructions such as these. However, one thing I will say, which comprises all the rest: you must remain unwavering in your fidelity to observe not only the spirit but also the letter of your Rule. In particular, you must see to it that you do not omit your spiritual exercises, whatever the difficulty or inconvenience; and you must look on any lack of obedience towards your Superiors as a sort of sacrilege. Do not be surprised at this word sacrilege that I use. Lack of perfect obedience in the circumstances in which you will find yourselves, surrounded as you will be by difficulties, temptations and dangers, will bring the Mission to ruin. For a Missionary, entrusted by God with the founding of a mission, to bring it to ruin is indeed a sacrilege, and beyond all doubt the greatest of crimes he could commit.

Always keep this well in mind, my dear Children, for it will help you to realise the seriousness, the gravity of your obligations. The spirit of faith which energises and guides you, will make you fear above all else to hear Our Lord make the same reproach to you as he made to the unfaithful Apostle, should you, through negligence or inattention become the cause of the failure of the Mission: Amice,

ad quid venisti.

I repeat once again, for I cannot do so too often, lack of fidelity to your Rule, however unimportant each point may appear in itself, lack of perfect obedience to your Superiors will bring the Mission to ruin. When there is not perfect regularity in a community, when the spirit of obedience is not found there in its perfection, disorder soon creeps in, and with disorder comes complete powerlessness to do good, followed soon by waning interest, then discouragement, then sin, then even apostasy. In the sphere of the apostolate, more indeed than in any other sphere, is literally fulfilled the word of the Holy Spirit: 'He who is unfaithful in little things will fall little by little.' This other saying is based on common experience: 'The corruption of the best is the worst of corruptions.'

Of this we must be convinced, that for a Missionary, there can be no compromise: he must choose between complete sanctity, at least desired and pursued with constancy and courage, or absolute perversion. The history of the Missions is full of such wretched examples. My dear Children, I pray to God to remove you from this world in the first steps of your vocation, rather than let you fall into such a pit!

To avoid such a fate, to remain strictly faithful to the Rule, for fidelity is the barrier which protects you against all the attacks which could assail you, you need at all costs a spirit of faith; it alone will enable you to rise above all the weakness, inclinations and passions of your lower nature.

