

## **April 2016 – Canada**

### **Spirituality – Providence**

My dear friends,

May the grace of our Lord, the blessing of His mother, and the protection of St. Joseph be ever with you. As we begin our reflection on Divine Providence, it is essential that we firmly root within our hearts and sustain our spirituality in the thought that we are not seeking answers but the living God. While God has already found us, we continue to search for this sacred presence within us and respond to it with authenticity and sincerity.

After the upheavals of the French Revolution, there was a resurgence of the idea of Providence among Catholics in France. Several religious institutes took the name of Providence (the Sisters of Ruillé in 1806, the Sisters of Pommeraye in 1816, ...). These congregations worked in health care and educational establishments and placed themselves under the patronage of Providence, thus making an act of faith in God's intervention in human affairs.

My relationship with Providence began long before I became a priest. I learned it from my parents and those close to me in the faith. Some of these had risked their lives during the french revolution. Through these faith-filled people, I came to see that confidence in Providence naturally flows from and is intrinsic to our faith in God.

In addition to the people in my early life, Providence also gifted me with the person of Fr. Mollevaut who for over 30 years patiently and persistently worked the soil of my faith life. As a young priest, I met him at St. Sulpice Solitude at Issy in Paris where he was superior. He became my mentor and spiritual guide. He was kind and compassionate in his honesty and frankness with me.

He had keen insight and he quickly realized my tendency to excessive penance and helped me to balance and humanize it by adherence to Christ and his teachings and participation in his mysteries. He also dealt firmly with my tendency to get carried away by my enthusiasms. When I saw the extreme shortage of country priests – I wanted to be a pastor. When I meditated on the lives of the desert father, I wanted to become a Trappist. When I read about the vast lands still not evangelized, I wanted to go to the foreign mission. Fr. Mollevaut's response: *God has called you to your present responsibilities and you must continue them until God calls you elsewhere.*

There are three points I would like to share with you in our conversation. They are: Confidence in Providence; Abandonment to Providence; and Cooperation with Providence.

## **Confidence in Providence**

I did not realize until recently when Mary Kay made note of it that Providence is the most repeated word in the Circular Letters.

From the beginning my belief in Providence was so strong that I considered Holy Cross as God's work and I was merely a simple tool. I wrote in 1840 at the very beginning of this work:

“I am convinced that **Providence**, which has in the past done everything necessary for the development and perfection of its work, will continue to bestow on it most abundant blessings.” (Circular Letter, January 1, 1840)

And again in 1841:

“I have been but a **simple tool** which the Lord will soon break that he may substitute for it one more worthy. In his plan they are to develop or, at least, to solidify what I have begun. In the midst of the most painful trials, I have never lost hope in Providence or in your fidelity to the sublime vocation which God has given you.”  
(Circular Letter, September 1, 1841)

My trust in confidence was so strong that I preached in a sermon in 1845:

“If there is a God, then there is by that fact Providence. He sees the movement of our muscles, the circulation of our blood, the thoughts of our mind and the beating of our hearts ... Providence knows the number of hairs on our head and not one of them falls without his permission. Providence knows the needs of the little birds opening their beaks for food; he also knows our hopes and desires. Providence feeds, he warms, he clothes and protects everything that breathes; in a word, he is all in all, everywhere. He is our God, he is our Father and we are his children. Can he forget us and abandon us to chance? No, he tells us, even if a mother was to forget her child, which is hardly possible, I will never forget you.”

Thirteen years later, I reminded the members:

“If I could have foreseen the developments of the Congregation of Holy Cross from the outset, I could have then regulated and coordinated everything in advance. If such were the case, however, this Congregation would have been merely a human combination and not the work of **Providence**. The fact of the matter is that it began and developed in a manner so mysterious that I can claim for myself neither credit for its foundation nor merit for its progress. Therein lies the indubitable proof that God alone is its author, since according to Saint Augustine, ‘when we cannot find the cause of a good work, we must recognize that the Lord is its beginning and its author.’ (Circular Letter, April, 13, 1858)

To increase trust in Providence in the members, I regularly encouraged the members to see the hand of Providence in events:

“In view of the serious events taking place in Paris, I believe it my duty to advise you to remain calm and faithful to your obediences as long as you do not receive further news, not to involve yourselves in matters having no bearing on your vocation and remain convinced that God **will work for the good of those who love him.**”  
(Circular Letter, February 24, 1848)

*“What must lift us up above fearful preoccupations and support our courage is that a **paternal providence**, even in its rigors, presides over all events and brings them to worthy ends.”*  
(Circular Letter, April 12, 1848)

## **2. Abandonment to Providence**

Over and above confidence in Providence, dear friends, I emphasized the practice of *holy abandonment* to Providence. This is a spirituality inspired by Saint Francis de Sales and Saint Ignatius.

The practice of *abandonment* or *holy indifference* means obedience not only to the express will of God, that is, the commandments, the evangelical counsels, the duties of one’s state in life and the directives of legitimate authority, but also to *God’s will of good pleasure*, namely, unforeseen events, ups and downs of daily life, deceptions, suffering, illness, death and in the spiritual life, fervor and aridity.

In 1863, I wrote about this practice in my letters and meditations:

“Oh, how sweet it is to abandon ourselves to the love of our Father who is in heaven and to seek his holy will ... His will in this matter is not left to doubt. The Congregation of Holy Cross is God’s work and by the very fact that he has not permitted its ruin despite the many terrible attacks of the enemy of all good, he wants it to continue in existence and even develop in greater proportions.” (Circular Letter, January 1, 1863)

I shared this prayer in one of my meditations:

“Who will give me, O my Savior ... to finally become **indifferent** to all that you ask of me, completely abandoned to your Providence, having no other concern than doing all for your good will and serving you in faithfulness until my dying breath?”  
(Meditation, Jesus’ Submission to the Conditions of Infancy)

“The saints discovered God’s invisible will in visible events. They carried out everything that was presented to them for their victory and merit. Where are you regarding this state of abandonment to the good pleasure of Providence? Examine yourself on this and resolve from now on to abandon yourself to what God will ask of you.”  
(Meditation, Return of the Holy Family to Judea)

In addition to writing and speaking of this abandonment, I need to honestly tell you that my own abandonment to Providence was particularly tested in an episode in the life of the Congregation. Shortly before the steward of the house in Paris created the serious financial debacle that almost wiped out the Congregation, I received from Mlle Dubignon a legacy which alone would have sufficed to cancel this debt. This legacy was contested by an heir and was the subject of a long court process. I struggled intensely to practice prudence and justice with a great confidence in God. This demanded of me an extraordinary abandonment to Providence. I also kept the members of the congregation regularly informed about the progress of the affair.<sup>1</sup>

“I am sure you are anxious to know about the lawsuit before the Laval tribunal ... I am not all that preoccupied by it because I have confidence in the justice of my cause, the fairness of the judges and Providence’s good will ...” (Circular Letter, January 1, 1858)

“My case is under appeal before the court of Angers and is to be pleaded on February 2<sup>nd</sup>. If it is lost, it can contribute to setting a grievous precedence for religious communities by making legacies to a religious or even to a priest impossible. Therefore I order the following prayers for the divine will to be accomplished in this serious circumstance ... (Circular Letter, January 24, 1859)

Two years later the judgment was still in abeyance. I continued to ask for prayers that God’s will be done (Circular Letter, April, 1861). Finally the Angers court gave its decision and I shared this with the members:

“At last the will of God in my appeal against the verdict of the court of Angers is known to me. Although it is not as I should like to see it, naturally speaking, still I adore this will, I bless it, and I beg of you not to be saddened by this new trial. By depriving me of a considerable sum of money, which I had in no way sought, this new decision makes me more detached from the things of earth and gives us all a new opportunity to suffer for the love of Jesus Christ ... Doubtless, I would have been most happy to offer the congregation a property whose value exceeds the debt with which the community has so unjustly been burdened. This would have removed from your minds a harassing anxiety, the temporal future of the Congregation of Holy Cross.

God, however, has been pleased to deprive us of this consolation in order to **deepen our confidence in him** and to oblige us to **abandon ourselves to his Providence** in this matter as well as in the affair of our eternal salvation.”  
(Circular Letter, June 7, 1861)

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<sup>1</sup> Cf Paul-Eugene Charbonneau, *Le saint abandon chez P'Ire Moreau*.

*Do you see and understand how this legacy or donation would have more than wiped out the debt? Do you understand that in justice it was due to me according to the will of the donor? Yet Providence had other plans and through God's gift I was offered another legacy – abandonment to his Providence.*

“We must first ‘seek the kingdom of heaven and its justice’ and then abandon ourselves to Providence. That is why I beg of you to renew yourselves in the spirit of your vocation, which is the spirit of poverty, chastity and obedience ... If such is our conduct, we can rely on the help of Providence, and although there are still considerable debts to be paid off, God’s help will not be wanting in our hour of need. Providence never fails to provide for all the necessities of those who abandon themselves to its guidance in accomplishing their duties, even if it becomes necessary to send angels to help them ... Oh, how sweet it is to abandon ourselves to the love of our Father who is in heaven and to seek his holy will.”

(Circular Letter, January 1, 1863)

Later still, when Holy Cross was seriously threatened in its very existence, he wrote to Mother Mary of the Seven Dolors:

“If it is true, and it most certainly is, that trial is the crucible where God places souls he wants to form for heaven, yours is made up of the illnesses and deaths of your daughters and the continual contradictions coming from America. What would it be like if it were necessary to add the destruction of the work to which we have dedicated our life, an undertaking which should contribute to the glory of Jesus Christ and the salvation of souls? We are not yet there; even so, we must be resigned to drinking the chalice to the dregs. Let us lose ourselves in this divine will and continue to take all means to escape the clutches of the devil; let us learn how to abandon ourselves to the good pleasure of our Father in heaven whatever it may cost our poor nature.” (Letter, March 3, 1866)

### **3. Cooperation with Providence**

My dear friends let me explain further the virtue of holy abandon and cooperation with Providence.

Holy abandon, that is, the act of love and trust in God’s goodness, has nothing at all to do with a carefree letting go of things. It has nothing to do with failing to respond to issues of peace and justice, war and violence. In abandoning ourselves to God we do not neglect what is in our power to correct wrongs done to ourselves and others and to ensure the success of undertakings confided to us by God’s Providence because the Lord desires to use us to accomplish the plans Providence has placed in our hands.

“If it is true that we must seek ‘above all things the kingdom of heaven and its justice’ ... Our one ambition must be to bring forth children of Jesus Christ by means of Christian education or the apostolic ministry. Lastly we must not display an anxiety which is injurious to divine Providence by being unduly worried over food and clothing. It is none the less true, however, that **prudent foresight and a spirit of work and economy** are indispensable and sacred duties for each and every one of the members of Notre-Dame de Sainte-Croix.” (Circular Letter, January 5, 1844)

“Our duty for the present is to seize upon everything which can contribute to realizing God’s designs in our regard and **to see now** what reasons we have for hope or fear in the future.”

(Circular Letter, January 4, 1845)

“You whom God has called to one of these Associations destined in the designs of Providence to accomplish so much good, I beg you to do everything in your power to expand the work of Holy Cross and to spread it by every means which Heaven puts within your reach.”

(Circular Letter, June 27, 1849)

*“But there is one condition which is essential for the future of the Congregation of Holy Cross, a condition without which not even Providence will act: the cooperation of our good will, the fidelity **to correspond** to the grace of our vocation.”*

(Circular Letter, January 1, 1857)

So essential to the dynamic growth of the charism of Holy Cross is this Trust in Providence, Abandonment to Providence, and Cooperation with Providence.

An example we have from Sacred Scripture is the story of Joseph, the Patriarch in the book of Genesis. He was sold by his brothers and taken to Egypt. Then a famine erupted in the land of kinsfolk who travel to Egypt for assistance. Unbeknown to them they present themselves to their brother, Joseph. After dialogue and Joseph revealing to them his identity, he says to them: God meant it for good. (Genesis: 50, 20) Like Joseph, I could say at the end of my life that some meant to harm me, to cast me aside, and God meant it for good, to achieve God’s end and the enrichment and salvation of many souls.

In each of your lives as well, mysteriously yet powerfully God brings the convoluted, mixed-up and even betrayed life to an overflow of goodness, even for enemies and for those who care little for you.

A providential, divine plan reaches into the depth of your existence. At times you may reach a clear though passing glimpse of it. Other times you intuit it during prayer, yet always you are being directed and guided by it.

Prayer will plunge you deeper into the depths of yourselves where God resides, where hidden dreams are revealed, where your best selves gain inner strength. There you find a renewal of peace and strength, a deeper conviction that God's mysterious yet most real Providence is taking even more effective control of your lives. More and more you will acquire serenity even in the face of problems, disappointments, betrayal, ups and downs of daily life. The words of Joseph become your own: God meant it for good. The words of Jesus take flesh in the life of Holy Cross: The stone rejected by the builders has become the cornerstone. (Ps. 118: 22-23)

Today, as in the beginning, we are called to immerse ourselves in the questions which penetrate our lives, to live our doubts and questions in hopeful expectation. We have this hope because we are grounded in the providential roots of our charism while we wait on the Lord who has called us and who is faithful (1 Cor.1:9).

As we hear in this Easter Season may you more and more acquire inner peace and serenity in the face of problems, disappointments, even betrayal. I will never abandon you. Peace it is I. Do not be afraid.

I place my hands in yours and keep you in my heart as I remain affectionately and deeply united with you in Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

Fr. Basil Moreau

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CSC Congress  
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