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1-1-2011

07. We are just a bunch of nobodies

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Repository Citation

de Mare, C. (2011). 07. We are just a bunch of nobodies. Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/anthologie-spiritaine-english/59>

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We are just a bunch of nobodies

To Ernest Briot, a Seminarian at Issy¹

Ernest Briot² was a Sulpician seminarian studying at Issy, where Francis Libermann had lived for six years. He wished to enter the Congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary. However, he confessed that he was not much good for anything, finding study difficult, and lacking financial resources. Libermann in this letter tells him that there are far more important things than that.

“Jesus, Mary, Joseph”

La Neuville, near Amiens, 10th August 1843

My dear Brother,

You will be thinking that I have forgotten you, but the opposite is true. Despite all your problems, you can feel assured and be full of confidence in our good Mother who will support you. He who can make children of Abraham from stones will have no problem in forming a missionary of the Heart of Mother out of the poor man that you admittedly are.

If I had been given the job of making something out of you, I would never have agreed, even if you had been the most accomplished man on earth. We are all worthless people, who have been brought together by the will of the Master, in whom

¹ N.D. IV pp. 303-305.

² Ernest Hyacinth Erasmus Angel Briot de la Mallerie (1813-1870) was born in the diocese of Vannes. He made his consecration and was ordained priest in 1844. He worked in Gorée in 1845, then went to Gabon in 1846. He returned to France in January 1848, becoming bursar and then superior. He made some bad mistakes financially as bursar, and left the Congregation in 1857. He retired to Switzerland, and died in 1870.

lies all our hope. If we thought we were worth something, we would not accomplish very much. Paradoxically, now that we are nothing, have little, and are good for less, we can dream of doing something really worthwhile. This is because we do not rely on ourselves, but rather on him who is almighty. Do not be concerned about your weakness and poverty. It is when we are weak that the power and mercy of Jesus can really reveal themselves in us. The glory in anything that we achieve will thus belong to him. An axe is not proud of what it accomplishes in the hands of the woodcutter. You admit that you cannot learn very easily, so, we will arrange for you to study theology according to your capabilities, and I assure you that it will be sufficient.

Your long list of faults does not bother me in the least. None of them will be a major obstacle to the graces that God has decided will pass through you to many abandoned souls. So be courageous and full of confidence. Do not be like Moses, who realising how unfit he was for the great task laid on him, brought up far too many excuses. He was over fearful. Remember that only one thing is necessary for poor missionaries like us: we must act as if we were dead¹ and allow God to treat us just as he pleases. Remember what Saint Paul said: God has chosen what is nothing to destroy what is self-important, "*Cum infirmor, tunc potens sum*"². My real strength lies in the confidence I have in God. He will only be our strength, of course, when we admit our weakness. That is his privilege, for it is He who is infinitely wise. So when he adopts us as an instrument, he must give his own strength to carry out his wishes.

¹ In other words, totally available for whatever God wishes

² "*When I am weak, then I am strong*" (2 Cor. 12.10)

So you should be happy, my dear friend, to have to empty yourself and depend entirely on the one who sends you. Do not be surprised if you find yourself getting feelings of pride. They are not reasonable, of course, but then pride is never reasonable. Just treat such feelings as totally unimportant and put them aside without the least anxiety. Try to stay calm in the midst of your problems. Keep yourself humble and poor, and totally disposed to whatever God wants of you. Remain peaceful and gentle, expecting everything from his hands and nothing from yourself.

Our Lord has given you great graces, and will give you even more. It is your job to consecrate yourself to him alone, to his service and to his glory. Always be at rest and peaceful in his presence. It is up to God to accomplish everything, and for you to be at his disposal in peace, mildness and humility. You must have full confidence in his mercy and in the unbelievable kindness of the most holy Heart of Mary.

We are going to be very busy until the 8th September. Bishop Barron will be coming then, and the departure of the confreres is imminent¹.

You can send your trunk in advance. Send it here by wagon, and post the details to me. I will then be able to find it. Do not worry about paying for your upkeep: you will give what the good Lord wants you to give. Those who have nothing, pay nothing. Those who have something can give or not give as God sees fit. Write to me whenever you please, insofar as you think I can help you. I hope to have less work on my hands in the coming days, and so be able to reply more promptly to your letters.

¹ Libermann is talking of the first departure of his missionaries. There were seven priests of the Holy Heart of Mary, together with three orphans, called "Brothers", brought by M. Germainville. This expedition was to end in the "Guinea Disaster".

May the peace of our Lord be in your soul.

Yours in the love of Jesus and Mary,

Father F. Libermann
Missionary of the Holy Heart of Mary