

LENTEN PASTORAL

DIOCESE OF CHRISTCHURCH

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By the Grace of God and favor of the Apostolic See,
BISHOP OF CHRISTCHURCH

TO THE CLERGY, SECULAR AND REGULAR AND FAITHFUL
OF THE SAID DIOCESE, HEALTH AND BENEDICTION
IN THE LORD.

Dearly Beloved Brethren and Children in Jesus Christ:

God alone knows all that we, in New Zealand, owe to our Religious Orders. We know that without their powerful co-operation we could never do the noble work it is our glory and our duty to perform in the great task of education. Do we realise our indebtedness to the zeal and devotedness of the Marist Fathers and the Brothers of the Little Company of Mary? How often do we think of acknowledging our gratefulness to the Ladies of the Sacred Heart, the Sisters of the Mission, the Sisters of Mercy, and the Sisters of St. Joseph? Without their powerful help, their daily and hourly sacrifice and painstaking ability, could we ever maintain our schools in the efficient state to which they have attained under their untiring efforts? These efforts have been duly recognised by the Government inspectors, who visit and make their examination year after year.

Men marvel at the wonders wrought by our devoted Sisters and Brothers in every age and land. Can we not explain the principle underlying their praiseworthy conduct? Is it not to be found in the strength springing from the love wherewith they have vowed their lives to their thorn-crowned Head, love for our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ for His own sake, and love of immortal souls for the sake of Christ Jesus? This, and this alone, explains the life of abnegation, zeal, and perseverance in the arduous work of teaching.

During the earthly career of our Divine Lord it was hurled at Him as a reproach that He singled out little children and sinners as the recipients of His fondest favors. He seemed to prefer the company of sinners, leaving the ninety-nine just to go after the strayed sheep, which, when found, He carried in triumph, declaring that 'there is more joy in heaven over one sinner doing penance than ninety-nine just' (St. Matt. xviii., 13).

The Daughters of the Good Shepherd share the love of their heavenly Spouse for those who are treated as 'outcasts of society.' For seven and twenty years the work done by the Sisters of the Good Shepherd is fully known to God and His Angels.

From the day whereon it was our privilege to transfer them from St. Mary's, their temporary home, to their present noble establishment at Mount Magdala they have admitted to their Institute 997, whom they have brought back to the knowledge and love of God, whose sorrows they have soothed, many of whose paths they have made straight, whilst the tottering steps of the unsteady they have steadied. They have helped to prepare for their eternity 13, who, without them, might have appeared before the throne of the Almighty without having had time to say, 'Lord, have mercy upon me, a sinner.' Fifteen inmates over the age of 25 years in Christchurch, 22 from 20 to 25; 18 from 15 to 20; 40 from 10 to 15; 30 from 5 to 10; whilst their total number at present is 186. Is there a more angelic, more God-like work in the Church than that of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd at Mount Magdala? Humanly speaking, there is naught that is attractive in their ministry. All is purely superhuman therein. All is based on the love of God and the love of poor sinners! As of old, He allowed sinners to approach Him, assuring us that it was to call them to Himself that He came from the heights of Heaven to them, giving the lovely invitation, 'Come to Me all ye that are weary and heavy laden and I will refresh you.'

What a consolation for the truly Christian soul to know that they have it within their power to co-operate in the divine work of saving souls! What a consolation to know that without our aid there are not a few whose conversion is morally impossible! The world will neither harbor nor encourage them, nor even bear with them. There is nothing for them but sin and sadness, shame and disgrace. How great are the efforts required for the conversion of such! And, once converted, how is their perseverance to be ensured when the moral sense has been dulled, when the religious fences of virtue have been broken down, when the very intellect and the will are weakened by a fatal familiarity with evil? Never did the salvation of such souls more depend on you than at present, dearly beloved Children in Christ Jesus. The Nuns of Mount Magdala are sorely in need of more accommodation for their 'dear children.' They only ask you to help them to enlarge the enclosure for those who are seeking admission therein. You will not refuse this service to your Divine Master. You will not close the door to the poor penitent, who asks only a retreat wherein the world may not enter, and where she may weep for her sins to the last hour of her life. Oh, Brethren, could you but see the fruits of such charity, you would see the once most loathsome of earth bearing fruit the fairest and most lovely! For what is there fairer or more beautiful than humble repentance? Does it not possess a charm unknown even to innocence? Could you penetrate within their hallowed walls, and witness all the generous love, the sweet humility, the heartfelt gratitude of the poor converted sinners! Could you witness the fervor of their prayers; could you witness the tremulous accent wherewith they sing forth the Divine praises; could you see them prostrate in adoration, sinking to the earth in tenderness and reverence when admitted week after week to receive the Body and Blood of their forgiving Saviour, and then recall the time when that tongue was once more familiar with blasphemy, those lips once belching forth horrid oaths and lewd profanity, that these converted creatures who once rolled in the delirium of drink through the streets, then you would acknowledge the Divine power of the religion of the great Good Shepherd, and you would bless and thank God for having in His merciful goodness chosen you to be with the Sisters of the Good Shepherd in this Divine work, the instruments of His mercy.

If you have the greater glory of God, your own salvation, and the good of immortal souls at heart, then be merciful towards those who are so dear to the heart of Christ Jesus.

What shall we say of the bright example, the great sacrifice of the Sisters of Nazareth, who, for the last ten years or more, are doing such noble work in our midst? Truly imitators of the Divine Master, besides nursing and tending the aged and afflicted and incurable, they devote their energies to the training of dear little children, of whom the Divine Master hath said, 'Suffer little children to come unto Me and forbid them not, for such is the kingdom of Heaven.'

It is pleasing for us to know that their brilliant success in this great work has won for them the praise and admiration of the highest in the land as well as the friends and benefactors of those dear children.

Since their coming to the diocese in 1905 the devoted Sisters of Nazareth have received into their home 120 old men, of whom 52 have left and 36 have died; 106 women, of whom 44 have left and 30 departed this life; 300 children have received hospitality from them, 152 of whom were restored to their parents and 7 were prepared for their last home; making in all 526 men, women, and children, 248 who left, and 73 died.

The present numbers are 32 old men, 32 women, and 141 children in all—a grand total of 205. It is very sad to know that the accommodation at Nazareth House is far too inadequate for the daily demands. Had they more room at their disposal they could receive twice the number of inmates, both the aged of each sex and little children.