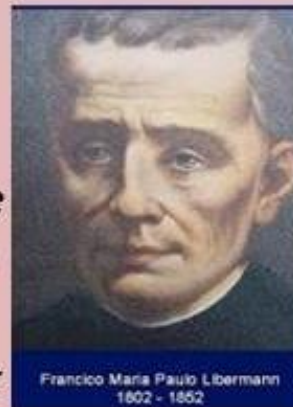




LIBERMANN NOVENA

24 January – 01 February 2014

Holy Father, You are wonderful in your love, grant us the grace to see confirmed by the Church the beautiful testimony of faith and holiness that Libermann left us. And so enlightened by his missionary testimony, we feel impelled by the Spirit to proclaim the Good News of Salvation with renewed ardor. Grant us, we ask, by the Sacred Heart of Mary, his beatification and the graces we implore through his intercession. Through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.



DAY 1 - RECEIVING BAPTISM AT THE AGE OF 24

Libermann was born on April 12th 1802, in Saverne, in the Alsace region (France), at the heart of a Jewish family. France had begun, a few years before, one of the greatest social and political changes of all its history and which influenced the whole world. The reforms brought by the French Revolution (1789) and by the Napoleonic laws, (1806) favouring the inclusion of Jews in society, had a strong impact on Jewish society which was opened up to new currents in thought even provoking a wave of conversions to Christianity.

Lazarus Libermann, father of Jacob, was the rabbi of Saverne on this occasion and was one of the strong opponents of this social reform which necessarily affected the Jewish lifestyle. A convinced practising Jew, he educated his children in the strictest observance of the law. Jacob, a docile and intelligent youth was his favourite son, and in his mind, the most suitable to succeed him in the function of rabbi. This was his objective in sending him to Metz to study and prepare for the job, in 1822.

For Jacob, who was 20, the stay in Metz, was a time of disenchantment with regard to the Jewish faith, leading him to religious indifference, disgusted by the narrowness of spirit and the differences present in the Metz rabbinical school. He began learning other languages and reading other books which were in fashion at the time. It was with one of these books, Rousseau's "Emile", that his Jewish faith went into deep crisis. On the advice of a colleague he decided to go to Paris to dialogue with some converts, among them two of his brothers and a former Talmud teacher, Dr. Drach. He arrived in Paris in the middle of November 1826, staying at this brother's house. The happiness he saw in his brothers, already Christians, dialogue with professor Drach and the reading of books which the latter gave him on the History of Christian Doctrine, created a deep disquiet in him: on a day of solitude and nostalgia, alone in a little room of Stanislas college, all the questions came to his mind; where finally was the truth? Had he lived in error for 24 years? He turned towards the God of his parents and in a gesture of deep humility asked to be illuminated. The light then came to his heart and he felt himself transformed interiorly. His eyes were opened and now he only wanted to be baptized. In baptism, he adopted the name of Francis Mary Paul Libermann. He was 24 years old when he became a Christian.

Bible reading Phil. 3, 5-12 (*Prayerful reading of the Word*)

Text from Libermann: The Lord, who is close to all who call on him from the bottom of their hearts, heard my prayer and answered it. All at once I was enlightened, I saw the truth and faith penetrated my mind and heart... From that moment, my one desire was to be baptised. I didn't have to wait long for this happiness; I was immediately given instruction for this wonderful sacrament and received it on Christmas Eve. On the same day, I made my First Holy Communion. I have no words to express the change that took place in me as the waters of baptism flowed over my head. *Anthology p. 66*

SRL 50: *Like all Christians, we have been called in baptism to the fullness of love and holiness, to carry on Christ's mission in the Church, and to bear witness in the world to the Good News.*

Question for reflection:

We may already have been through crises similar to what Libermann had: falling into religious indifference, questioning the teaching of the Church and our Rule of Life, going through periods of darkness and downheartedness. How do we live through these moments?

DAY 2 - LEAVING HIS FAMILY

Lazarus Libermann, Jacob's father, did not quite understand the real intentions of his son when the latter asked to make a journey to Paris. Convinced that he was simply moved by the desire to deepen the Jewish faith and traditions, he did not oppose such a journey and even gave him the address of people he trusted and a letter of recommendation.

The recently baptized, Francis Mary Paul, in order not to hurt his father and his family whom he loved so much, was hiding his conversion and his baptism as much as possible. He knew that his father had suffered with the conversion of the other brothers, Samson, Samuel, Felix. In the letters he wrote he discreetly hid what had happened, delicately avoiding the topic and turning to other subjects. He knew that the news could be fatal for this father, so dedicated and practising his faith so much, all the more so since the son Jacob was always the one in whom all hopes were placed for the succession in the role of Rabbi of Saverne. But, his conversion came out in a newspaper 'The Friend of Religion' (L'Ami de la Religion) making the fact public and his father got to know. The reaction of the father was not long in coming; in a letter which he wrote to him he let him know in a furious way, all his discontent; he reprimanded him for the decision he took and cursed him. Francis Libermann got to know, later on, that his father had disinherited him and had declared him to be dead and ordered the family to dress for mourning when he heard of his conversion. Libermann never again went back to his father's house, in Saverne; his brothers who remained Jews accused him of being responsible for his father's death, three years later.

His comrades in Saint Sulpice seminary noticed that something was happening and he commented with one of them who left us the following testimony: *"I still remember his deep and admirable resignation when he received the letter in which his father covered him with criticism because of his conversion and cursed him. Bathed in tears he told me: 'But I am a Christian' . In the midst of the tears one noticed a smile of joy and happiness"*. Notes et Documents, vol. I p. 130

Later, in a letter to a confrere Libermann commented: *"God dragged me along without asking my permission and with a strength that I have never observed in any other person so far... The Lord helped me to stand up to my father, who wanted me to renounce my faith, but I renounced him rather than the faith.."* Anthology, p. 75

Bible reading: Mt. 10, 37-39 (*Prayerful reading of the Word*)

Testimony of a co-disciple of Libermann:

"Seeing him many times shedding tears during prayer, I dared to ask him what was the cause of such great sadness. He confessed to me that he had belonged to the Jewish religion, that the majority of his relatives were still in error and that the thought of them on the way to perdition deeply saddened him.; his prayers and tears before God tried to snatch them for this error. He recommended their conversion to my poor prayers. It was the only consolation which he asked from heaven".ND I 92

SRL 70.2 *In witnessing to poverty, we place ourselves in the hands of Divine Providence, accepting cultural uprooting and the degree of separation from our family that is entailed. We accept even that insecurity our apostolic activities may impose.*

Question for reflection: Relations with our families sometimes require renunciation not always well understood. How do we handle the tension between what they would desire, as blood family, and that which the life of religious missionaries demands of us?

DAY 3 - GOING THROUGH THE TEST OF ILLNESS

After being baptized, Libermann entered Saint Sulpice seminary in Paris and began theological studies, preparing him for ordination. *“My entrance to the seminary was a time of blessings and joys for my soul. I felt as if I was someone else, I breathed deeply”* he tells us.

Everything seemed to be going according to his wishes, when suddenly he was victim of an epileptic attack just when about to receive the subdiaconate. In a letter to his brother Samson he revealed his disappointment and his confidence: *“My illness has not left me completely and as a result I will not be able to be ordained subdeacon, in the coming years and maybe never again. I can promise you that **my dear illness is a great treasure** for me preferable to all the goods that the world offers. I shall stay in the seminary as long as the superior is willing to welcome me”*. He could not continue in the seminary now since the horizon of ordination was blocked for him. Returning to the world was not what he wanted either. He placed himself humbly in the hands of the director, available for what he would find best, with the unique desire of serving only God, in that which depended on him. He then began a pilgrimage of faith which lasted for ten years, without his knowing, during this time what would be the final outcome. Libermann went through moments of great downheartedness, and was even tempted to commit suicide. In confidence he told a co-disciple that while crossing a bridge the desire came to him to throw himself in the river; *“only the look of my Jesus holds me back and gives me patience”*.

The director proposed that he go to Issy seminary, near Paris, as assistant to the bursar, where he lived for six years. The illness did not leave him and attacks came when least expected. But it was this way of Calvary which identified him with Jesus, which transformed him and gave him the capacity to face other desert crossings and other unexpected trials. With the illness he was deepening his sense of abandonment which later became a cross-beam of his spirituality. It was in Issy seminary that he understood that from our weakness the Lord makes his strength. Recognized by all as a person with an illness, he became the confidant of many comrades and a real agent of spiritual renewal for his co-disciples.

Bible reading: John 9, 1-7 (*Prayerful reading of the word*)

Testimony of a co-disciple:

“Mister Libermann did nothing extraordinary... He had miserable health which he was obliged to look after in obedience. How did he go so high? For this reason: he had the secret of doing the most common things in a way that was not common, that is, of doing them in Our Lord. When he was ill, one could clearly see, without being spiritual, that it was not he who was suffering; he seemed to lend his body to Jesus Christ to suffer in him.... With a heart always full of God, seeing Him and only Him in everything, he warmed us all with his conversations. People saw that he took heart, was inflamed, that he felt what it was to love and bring others to love. (N D I, 181)

SRL 147: *To our older members and those in ill health, the Congregation will willingly and cheerfully offer its care, to enable them in patience and in faith to take up this different form of the one same mission the Lord chooses to entrust to them. The retirement years when lived in faith are a time of growth in grace, both on the human and the spiritual planes. They are also a grace given by the Lord to the whole Congregation.*

Question for reflection: For many of us illness has become an inseparable “comrade” of our pilgrimage. Living with her is always a trial. How can Libermann be an inspiration in this Calvary climb which we have to do?

DAY 4 - LIVING WITH FAILURE

In Issy Libermann learned to hope in God for everything. His illness blocked a way for him but opened many doors. His piety was quickly noticed and above all the constant peace which was manifest in him and radiated all round him. *“Everything in him showed the constant action of supernatural life.”* Confident in many hearts desirous of furrowing the ways of holiness, he used to find the exact and appropriate word, accompanying them on the journey.

At the end of six years in the seminary at Issy, in 1837, they invited him to undertake the important task of master of novices of the Eudists, in Rennes. That Congregation was looking for someone whose piety and spiritual depth would give a new impulse to vocations. They knocked on the door of Issy seminary, with the well founded hope of finding someone there for that mission. They proposed young Libermann to them for this task; after some hesitation he accepted and left for there in July 1837.

His time in Rennes was one of the driest and most arid moments that Libermann lived through. He felt that his action on the novices was not efficacious and that his work was not bearing fruit. Ambiguity about his role in the direction of the work quickly became obvious, since he, a simple seminarian, with no experience of pastoral work, had to direct novices who had already been ordained and his conferences were not always well received. The superior interfered at times in his work removing his authority and freedom. In a letter to the director of Issy seminary he complained in the following manner: *“The whole period I spent with the Congregation of Jesus and Mary at Rennes was a time of suffering for me... I felt absolutely useless and incapable of doing anything for the glory of God... I spoke, I gave instructions, I tried to inspire fervour, but all my words were dead, unblest by God and leading to absolutely no spiritual development”*.

At the end of two years, after much suffering he decided to abandon the work with a certain sense of having failed. Two friends, comrades from Issy, asked him to join them in a new project, for the evangelization of the poor.

Bible reading: Mk 4, 35-40 (*Prayerful reading of the Word*)

Libermann Text: (Letter to his brother Samson)

I have left Rennes. I no longer have any person or any creature on earth in whom I can place my trust. I have nothing. I know neither what will become of me nor how I shall even be able to live. I shall live a life which, by worldly standards, is despicable, forgotten, neglected and useless. A great number of those who loved and respected me will surely disapprove of my conduct. Perhaps I will even be looked on as insane or insufferably proud. I shall be despised and might even suffer persecution... My dear friends, let us rejoice that we have a Father in heaven, a loving and loveable Lord Jesus as well as a wonderful Mother. They will never abandon those who give themselves completely for their glory and their love. So have no fear whatsoever on my behalf; I am the happiest man in the world, because I no longer possess anything but God, Jesus and Mary; I am already in heaven, while still living on earth! *Anthology p 121*

SRL 142: *God's call to come and work for the Kingdom is not made to us just once for all. Our response has to be updated continually. So it is a necessity for all of us to retrain ourselves without fail if we are to remain true to our calling in the world and in the Church.*

Question for reflection: How to balance the 'good of mission' and 'my' self fulfilment?

DAY 5 - GOING TO ROME

The journey which Libermann decided to make to Rome, after leaving Rennes, in order to present and have approved by the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, a missionary project for the evangelization of the negroes of Haiti and Bourbon Island would be madness to human eyes. Libermann was aware that many would treat him as “foolish and proud” to be launching himself in such an adventure. *“In Paris, Lyon and Rome all to whom I spoke about my project disapproved of me”*. Libermann wanted to present himself without any triumph, with no influence, no support, in order to be sure that it was only the will of God which was leading him. He knew what risks he was running: he was a mere seminarian, with an illness which prevented him being ordained priest and was completely unknown in the Vatican corridors. He trusted only in God and believed that the interior impulse which made him advance came to him from the Holy Spirit. For this reason, rowing against the tide, he did not give up.

The Cardinal Prefect did not receive him cordially, nor did he show enthusiasm and the reply which he gave him left him frozen: *“ he not being a priest could not even think about the missions”*. The comrade who went with him, Mr. Maximo de la Bruniere, abandoned him, leaving him in the most extreme penury. The reply to the project was slow in coming and the time of waiting was becoming long. In the small rented room in the attic of the house, Libermann lived in extreme poverty: badly dressed, badly fed, often not having money to pay for the stamps for the letters he was writing; dedicated much time to prayer, he meditated the Word of God, visited churches and wrote. That is where the “Commentary of the Gospel of St. John” was born, and the first Rule of Life for the members of the future work; there it was decided to dedicate the work being born to the Sacred Heart of Mary.

God, who does not abandon those who hope in Him, gave him, at the end of a year, everything necessary so that the work could be born. After a pilgrimage to the Virgin at Loreto, Libermann felt himself cured of epilepsy: on arrival at the house, a letter awaited him telling him that the bishop of Strasbourg would be willing to ordain him; the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith trusted the new project and encouraged him to go ahead.

Bible reading: Lk. 14, 28-33 (*Prayerful reading of the Word*)

Beginning of the Memorandum presented by Libermann in Rome, in March 1840

“We are a group of Frenchmen who have come together to pursue this project that we are convinced is inspired by Our Lord... For the last two years, we have been deeply touched by reports we have received of the great sufferings that are crushing these poor people in several countries, and of the little help they are given to escape from the ignorance and vice in which they are sinking. They are engulfed by so many misfortunes that their very salvation is in jeopardy. We are determined to work for their salvation, whatever the cost, knowing that there are very many sufferings, humiliations and contradictions which await us in undertaking such a work.” *Ant. p. 396*

Torre d’Aguilha 1.2 *That which began through the power of the Spirit with the founders, must be received, followed and developed by each succeeding generation in the different historical, social and cultural situations in which they find themselves. It is not a question of returning to the time of our foundations, but rather of living the charism today as the founders would live it in our place- in the fidelity to the grace that has been given us.*

Question for reflection: How could I distinguish, in the choices I make and the projects I start, what comes from the Holy Spirit and what is, only, a personal affirmation or a disguised flight from a problem.

DAY 6 - BUYING A HOUSE FOR FORMATION

Having been ordained on September 18th 1841, in Amiens, Libermann had no other desire than that the missionary project would advance. We can say that the Congregation of the Sacred Heart of Mary was born on the following Saturday, 25th, at the Eucharist which he celebrated at the altar of the archconfraternity of Our Lady of Victories, in Paris, for present with him were the dreamers of this project: Le Vasseur, Tisserant, Collin and the parish priest Fr. Desgenettes. Two days later on the 27th they went to the new house near Amiens, bought to be the novitiate of the future missionaries. The first novices were Fr. Levasseur and Mr. Collin; Fr. Tisserant had to stay for some time longer in Paris because of pastoral commitments. Libermann was chosen to be formator and the one in charge of the work. It was in that house at La Neuville, that the first missionaries were formed, there that Libermann showed himself to be an animator of the missionary spirit, a spiritual guide and an architect of mission. He felt identified with the work and its motivator, but he did not hide how much this weighed upon him: *“I tell you frankly that if I had known what lay ahead, I would have been terrified and would never have dared to undertake so great a work, one that is way beyond my powers. But I am now in chains and must go on. I will continue to move ahead until this corruptible body falls apart and then God will find another instrument that is stronger and more suitable for carrying out his designs”*.

In the formation house at La Neuville, the group was growing; Libermann was helping those who arrived to get an authentic missionary spirit. Life was simple and consisted of domestic work, prayer, spiritual formation conferences and some studies. It is noteworthy that the majority of those who joined the group were ordained priests or about to be so. Some lay people were directed towards being brothers, who would be so necessary in the missionary work.

It was from this house that the first missionaries went out, it was there that Libermann got news of the first failures, it was also there that his understanding of missionary life was maturing and becoming solid and coherent.

Bible reading: 2 Tim 2,1-13 (*Prayerful reading of the Word*)

Libermann's letter to the Las Palmas community written in La Neuville in 1844.

My very dear Brothers, love one another. What will you ever achieve without peace and unity in your community? Therefore show that the spirit of Jesus Christ is really among you by your perfect union and mutual affection. Bear with each other's faults of character and imperfections. Be for your confreres a source of consolation in the love of Jesus Christ. All your sufferings will seem as nothing, if the love of Jesus unites you. Do not judge or oppose one another... Console one another, as you would Jesus Christ himself, who is your Master. Be joyful together in the midst of your works, pains and afflictions, for you are the servants, and the apostles of Jesus Christ. *Anthology p. 274*

Bagamoyo General Chapter 3.1 *The General Chapter recognises the vital importance of formation. Formation is a life-long process leading candidates to transformation under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.*

Question for reflection:

In our formation communities the formators transmit the charism and spirituality of the founders. However, it seems that in the life of Spiritans there is a great distance between what is learned, professed, and what is lived in practice. Where might the root of this distance be? (*Re-read, if possible, the Superior General's letter of October 2013*)

DAY 7 - SENDING MISSIONARIES

The first missionary to leave, linked to the Work of the Negros, as it was then called, was Fr. Laval. He left at the end of May 1841, for the island of Mauritius, even before the opening of the novitiate of La Neuville. Le Vasseur left for the island of Bourbon, today called the island of Reunion, in February of 1842 and Fr. Tisserant for Santo Domingo, destined for Haiti, in November of the same year. Contradictions and disillusionment quickly made themselves felt. Confrontations with the local governments and civil authorities, open opposition of the whites of these islands and the bad example of the existing clergy, social disturbances. The reality was very different from the dream!

The big turnaround in the missionary perspective of the young Congregation came when Dr. Barron, appointed Prefect Apostolic of the two Guineas, a territory going from Senegal to Congo, asked Libermann to send him missionaries. Thus a new page was opened in the history of this young Congregation. The first missionaries for these territories left Bordeaux in September of 1843. Libermann comments on the fact in a letter to Fr. Laval: "I have just sent seven missionaries to Africa, to the coast of Guinea and Senegambia". (ND IV 398) Libermann cherished this sending in a special way; it was a door which was opening and in it he saw a sign from Providence. "*We had every reason to hope for great things in such a vast and abandoned mission*". All was well prepared according to the information received and everything was thought of. But in a few short months the news which arrived from there was terrible. The missionaries who had been sent were dying one after the other, and some people accused Libermann of having acted in a precipitate manner. Libermann commented on these losses with a bleeding heart: "*The blows which Our Lord has rained on us are so great, that I can only see in them an extraordinary act of his divine Providence... I also believe that God intended to give our seven missionaries to Guinea, not as apostles, but as intercessors before his throne of mercy*". (Anthology p. 248)

The trials did not discourage him but helped him to be more cautious in sending; he knew that the missionary has to identify with Jesus and be ready to give his life and be imolated with Him, but always with the prudence recommended by the Gospel.

Bible reading: 2 Cor 11,23-33 (*Prayerful reading of the Word*)

Libermann text

Just as Jesus Christ, sent by his Father, lived only for Him, you who have also been sent by the Father must live for Him in his spirit of holiness. Jesus Christ sanctified himself and sanctified his sufferings for the salvation of all; that is how he gave birth to those souls by his sufferings, and made them holy in truth. Therefore, a missionary who has been sent by Jesus Christ, and who does not make his sufferings holy cannot make others holy in the truth. This holiness must have its foundation in the depths of his being and show itself in the way he lives, works and suffers. This is the way the missionary gives birth to souls for God in the truth, after the example of Jesus Christ, because he gives to them the Saviour's life already present in himself. We should all see ourselves as victims, consecrated in accordance with the merciful will of God, in our work, suffering and death, all for his glory and for the salvation of others. Anthology p. 363

Bagamoyo 1.1 *The mission given us as a Congregation is the mission of God who is revealed as a communion of three Persons: the sending by the Father of the Son and the Spirit into the world reveals God's plan to share his life and his love with all human beings.*

Question for reflection: As a missionary in the Lord's vineyard, what do I most rely upon? How do I understand the need to become holy?

DAY 8 - THE FUSION WITH THE CONGREGATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

In different mission fields the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Mary met with the Fathers of the Holy Spirit and relations were not always cordial, especially in the French colonies. Some mutual accusations and denouncements appeared here and there. With his usual calm, Libermann believes that Providence will see to changing things. *“I have always had the feeling that the union of our two societies was in the plan of God. They have the same work and move in the same direction. It would be strange if divine Providence had brought two societies into existence for the same work, which could easily have been done by one”*

That of the Holy Spirit had a name, a history, an official recognition by the French government, but it lacked the enthusiasm of other times and had some difficulty in adapting to the increasing phenomenon of the emancipation of slaves. Libermann's sons, full of enthusiasm and attending above all to this human group, needed more support and recognition. In the different measures taken in Rome, the subject was looked at and the union of the two congregations was seen as a greater good for the Church. *“The Propaganda was very much in favour of this union”*. Libermann knew how to read the signs of the times, but waited for God's moment. In fact with the death of Fr. Fourdinier, a new spirit of understanding arose between the two congregations. All the difficulties which up to then were opposed with an invincible force to this fusion disappeared and, by the end of the year of 1848, all the members were united. *“With this in mind, and knowing that after the union we can still retain the same spirit that we have always had and our devotion to the Holy Heart of Mary, I was convinced that both Congregations would profit from coming together. This seemed to be the will of God and I believed it would meet with the approval of all the members”*. The Congregation would keep its ancient title of Holy Spirit and its constitutions which could be perfectly harmonized with those of the Sacred Heart of Mary.

Bible reading: 1 Cor 3, 1-13 (*Prayerful reading of the Word*)

1849 Regulations, after the fusion of the two societies.

The Congregation of the Holy Spirit exists in order to devote itself to the salvation of the most abandoned souls. So the members live the apostolic life and take whatever steps are needed to acquire the virtues proper to that state... To attain the perfection of that apostolic life, to preserve the fervour of the missionaries and for the stability and extension of its work, the Congregation has a fundamental and inflexible rule that its members must always live in community... Obedience and poverty are observed equally by all. Poverty means having nothing that belongs exclusively to oneself; the missionaries will receive everything from the community and cannot dispose of anything without permission. *Anthology p.700-701*

One Big Family (*Torre d'Aguilha, report of Fr. Pierre Schouver, Superior General*)

How well do we live together in this great and complex organization, which is the Congregation? It is not just somewhere where we carry out our duties on working days: it is the place where we have committed our whole life, to live as brothers and sisters in one big “rainbow” family... We must live in it, body and soul, not for ourselves but for the mission we have been called to.

Questions for reflection:

Divisions can happen. Ways of seeing and working, different formation journeys, diverse cultural origins. How do we overcome the divergences which arise between us Spiritans? What essential points do we identify in the spiritan culture?

DAY 9 - LOVING AS FAR AS GIVING ONE'S LIFE

Libermann lived the last years of his life as the eleventh Superior General of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit, at Lhomond street, where the seminary of that Congregation was. To revitalize the missionary spirit, he introduced some needed changes, but he mainly wrote a lot. He continued to accompany the novitiate, which was in the abbey of Gard, some kilometres from Amiens, going there for retreats and conferences. He now had a broader and deeper vision of missionary life. The "Instructions to Missionaries", written in 1851, a few months before his death, reflect the loving care that he has for this work and how he desired that each missionary would live the mission as Jesus did.

With the consolidation and extension of the work in Africa, his worries also increased. His health, which was always fragile, began to be affected by so much activity. In 1851 shortly before his death, he was saying to a missionary: *I have the joy of being able to say that I am as much African and more African than all of you because I've had all the diseases of Africa: seven years ago dysentery; last summer I began with a strange fever and ended up with a hepatic fever. LS IV p 687*

To the missionaries who wrote to him about the diseases and difficulties he spoke in the sense of offering one's life, giving oneself totally to God, for love of the Father, for the salvation of the brothers. He did not speak as one giving lessons, it is always hard to give lessons to one who is suffering, but as one who knows what it is to suffer, because he lived it daily. *"So let us rejoice, peacefully, in Jesus Christ that we have been called by God to be offered up together with his well beloved Son"*. In the moments before dying he said: **Yes, I offer my sufferings for you, for all of you and also for Guinea.** Libermann was never physically in Africa, but, in reality, his thoughts and his heart never left it, once he felt called to get involved in the "Work of the Negros". His heart belonged in fact, to the Africans.

Bible reading: 2 Tim 4, 1-8 (*Prayerful reading of the Word*)

Libermann text: My dear brothers, learn how to judge things correctly through God's eyes during the short time that you have to pass in this world. This life is very small and unhappy, but it can become rich and great for you through your sufferings, which are treasures of wealth and glory, thanks to the merciful plan of our all powerful God. Keep yourselves firmly and gently on the holy and difficult path in which God in his goodness has placed you. The road you follow is that of Jesus himself; walk in it as he did, following his example all the way, for the sanctification of others. Make yourselves holy, so that those people may be sanctified in the truth of God. Just as Jesus Christ, sent by his Father, lived only for Him, you who have also been sent by the Father must live for Him in his spirit of holiness. *Anthology 363*

Last words of Libermann quoted in SRL 38

Each of us keeps in mind the last words of Father Libermann: Be fervent, always fervent, and above all, charity, charity, charity above all. Charity in Jesus Christ, charity through Jesus Christ, charity in the name of Jesus Christ. Fervour, charity, union in Jesus Christ. I am seeing you all for the last time. I am happy to see you. Sacrifice yourselves for Jesus, for Jesus alone. God is all; man is nothing. A spirit of sacrifice, zeal for the glory of God, the salvation of souls». Anthology 173

Question for reflection

Which words of the founder do we retain in our memory and most influence us?