

+ J.M.J.
to M. Maupas, parish priest of Vassy

Monsieur and very dear Curé,

Last January I received three of your letters, one dated July 15, I don't know what year, the other July 16, 1833, and the other April 15, 1835. I wish your letters could be more frequent, more numerous, and take less time to reach me.

Since my arrival in Peking, having been unable to receive the alms that our good Procurator nevertheless sends us exactly; apart from travel expenses, I was reduced to living on the alms given to me by the charitable bishops, priests and simple faithful who gave me hospitality. Divine Providence has always provided abundantly for my food and my clothing. From my abundance I was able during my first year of existence in Korea to clothe and feed a catechist and three ecclesiastical students who must now be in Macao or in the islands of Siam. So, as you see, my miserable patrimony is not necessary for me to provide for my needs. I am only going to send you the news for this year without telling you anything about the country or the customs of the peoples with whom Divine Providence has called me to live.

The day before the departure of the couriers who were to take three students for the priesthood to Pienmen, the gateway to Eastern Tartary or Manchuria from Korea, and introduce M. Chastan; towards evening, at the very moment when they had assembled to greet me, a Christian came and struck fear among them: the reasons for fear which he announced seemed more than specious. He said that the Kouantseu, employees who fulfill the office of gendarmes in France, were in pursuit of some insurgents, that they had questioned travelers and searched their goods even in the saddles of horses. I saw myself a little embarrassed; I reflect a little before the good Lord. It never occurred to me that any accident might have happened to them. Moreover, considering what threatened us, if this expedition could not take place, I worked to dissipate their fear, and I had the happiness of succeeding, if not in dissipating it entirely, at least in weakening it sufficiently to resolve them to leave the next day. I promised them to offer the Holy Sacrifice every day to obtain for them the almighty protection of the Divine Providence.

The Lord seconded our wishes. M. Chastan happily arrived at Sehoul or Hanyang, capital of the kingdom, the students I had sent and all their guides reached Pienmen without the shadow of an accident, and there is reason to believe that Divine Providence continued its merciful protection at least as far as Macau. For if any accident had happened to them, the envoys of the Emperor who came here last October would have informed the Korean government, and we would not have failed to learn of it.

In the space of 4 months that we have been able to work diligently at the Holy Ministry, we have each heard more than 900 confessions, most of them people over 10 years old, and administered approximately 2000 baptisms of adults and children while traveling more than 150 leagues. I believe that one becomes merciful in these countries. Although our Christians have had no one to explain our holy doctrine to them, nevertheless it is rare to find any who, knowing how to read the Korean characters, do not know also tolerably enough of the Christian doctrine to receive the sacraments. Every day on Sundays and principal feasts they read together or in private the catechism or the respective Holy Gospels for each Sunday and feasts, with the homilies, and usually both one and the other. Big and small, no one dispenses with it; the grown-ups make it an honor to which the children aspire. If they did not have to fight against the black president of idolatrous sacrifices and tablets of the ancestors, nor having any other enemy instead, one could rightly call Korea, like the late dear Bishop liked to call it, the Promised Land.

At the end of last July, when I proposed to visit some Christians who had not yet been administered, I was attacked by a fever, the first attack of which lasted about 20 hours. During this attack my body became so hot that it seemed to me “clothed” with a garment of flames several inches high. I thought I had arrived at the last of my days. The fear of falling into the fires of purgatory on the one hand, on the other the regret of not being able to enter Heaven through the door of martyrdom affected me more deeply than I can express to you. Seeing myself dying thus, I sent for M. Chastan, who must have been only ten or twelve leagues away. On the evening of the second day the attack moderated; nevertheless, from the very frequent indispositions and malaises which I experienced for more than a year, but particularly for ten days, imagining that it was not a one-day illness, and, not being able to remain continually exposed to consideration by the pagans of the house and outside who came and went, I took the road to the city to treat this illness there with more facility. In the beginning, this fever renewed its bouts every two days, then it became daily and soon continued.

M. Chastan was also returning to town; he would even have arrived there before me if my call had not delayed him, he arrived there a day after me. He summoned and consulted several doctors, none knew of such a disease, I felt almost without interruption as during the per attack, the body clad cramped in a garment of flames. For several days I had been in this state, often near death; I was administered a remedy, which I took with reluctance, according to the idea I had been given of it. M. Chastan hearing the doctors and the other Christians who were at the house advised me to take it. I took it. During the night I approached several times close to death. M. Chastan had to be absent to do some administration a league away. I commended myself in a very special way to the Divine Mercy and to the Very Holy Virgin, I made a vow to her, and I begged her to preserve me from the fires of purgatory if I should die, and to obtain my healing from the good God, if it was his holy will and his glory that I lived. They called M. Chastan, and like the Christians believing my end to be near, he administered to me all the help of our mother, the Holy Church. No sooner had the Holy Eucharist appeared in my cell than I experienced relief and signs of a better future. All that day I felt like a man who is resting, relieved of an overwhelming burden. From that day on I was always less and less sick. However, until the end of October I could do nothing either for study or for administration. Today, thank God, I only feel a few slight indispositions which come more from the weather and the way of life that we have to keep up, than from a fever. M, Chastan and I have returned to the countryside.

Accept the assurance of my respect, and the sincere attachment with which I have the honor to be in union of prayers and Holy Sacrifices

Your most humble and obedient servant.

Petrus. Philibert Maubant