

47. My life is not very hidden

Françoise Perroton was the first pioneer of the Sisters of the Third Order Regular of Mary, which later became the Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary. This letter, posted from Tahiti on August 2, 1846, is in response to Fr Peter Julian Eymard, thanking him for receiving her into the Third Order. Earlier, in 1842, Perroton had read a letter written by Princess Suzanne Pukega of Wallis Island, asking for "devout women...to teach the women of Ouvea". Perroton's single-mindedness is shown in her determination to respond to this request. Her utter humility and trust in God is revealed in the contents of the letter.

"GOD ALONE"

EXTRACTS FROM A LETTER FROM MISS FRANÇOISE M. PERROTON TO FR PETER JULIAN EYMARD
(Written during the voyage and posted from Tahiti to Lyons, August 2, 1846)

- [1] Dear Rev. Father, however much you were pleased to receive my letter from Madeira, it is plain that my satisfaction was ever greater when I received your letter. Miserable girl that I am on the other end of the world! Isn't it too great an honour for me to receive a letter from Father Provincial? I have read it and reread it and shall read it yet again...
- [3] Thank you most sincerely, Father, for the honour you have bestowed on me by enrolling me in the Society of your Third Order. How did you come to think of me? You did not tell me what I had to do to fulfil my obligations in the Society. Well, I unite myself, in my intentions, with those who make up the Society. Many of their names are quite familiar to me.
- [4] I offer my deepest affection to all my sisters. You've told me how they try to imitate the hidden life of the Blessed Virgin. Father, how am I going to be able to do as they do? My life is not very hidden. I can see quite well that with my out-going activity I'll never come near such a perfect model. So I beg all of you, my very dear Sisters, to help me so that I don't fall behind on the path of the love of God. I really tell God that I love him; but in times of trouble and irritations I see that I love myself and my ways more than God's ways. So I really beg you for a spiritual push so that God will give me a spirit of mildness, patience, and resignation. Please pray to God so that he'll accept the offering I make of my whole person, so that he'll never let me pull back when faced with difficulties, but especially, especially so that I'll never confuse my own will with the will of God.
- [7] I leave you now, Father, as I beg you to accept this offering of my deep respect and to understand that I am for life your submissive daughter, Marie Perroton.

LM Doc. 108. [OM I, 13]. OPS I, 13.

Françoise was forty-nine years old when she left France for the unknown territory of Oceania. Her account describes not only the perilous journey at sea, but also her own inner journey of faith and trust. Of particular interest is the tension she experiences with the Marist call to be hidden and unknown. How can she live up to this with her "outgoing activity"? Perroton's daring comes from a desire to serve others for the glory of God, not for herself. This incredible lay woman shows that being hidden and unknown should not prevent Marists from undertaking great things.

