Dear Brothers,

You have learned of the departure of the Community of the Sons of Mary residing in Grandfresnoy. Their Superior General informed me of their decision by letter. I met with him last March 11 at the bishopric with Fathers Larribe and Chamberland.

You know people who are attached to the Sons of Mary or to the Army of Mary. And, there is no doubt that some of these people may be disoriented following the decision recently taken by the Community. My letter, addressed to you personally, is intended to help you in your ministry as you assist and listen to these people.

A large number of Christians from the parish of Saint Joseph de la Plaine d’Estrées have benefited from the presence of the Sons of Mary, their zeal and their availability in the celebration of Masses, baptisms, marriages, and funerals in that sector, as well as in the animation of the Christian community. I was able to make known my gratitude to their superiors.

At the same time, I have always told these same superiors, that I was in communion with the Canadian bishops regarding their reflection on the Army of Mary, a work founded by Mrs. Marie-Paule Giguère and inspired by her mystical experiences. In a letter of February 29, 2000, addressed to the President of the Canadian Conference of Bishops, Cardinal Ratzinger, who was the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith at the time, had himself taken a position in this matter.

This group of the Army of Mary is attached to a Marian devotion, and a love of the Eucharist; for this we can only rejoice. But their paper "Le Royaume" spreads other doctrines which are foreign to the faith of the Church.

Last year, Cardinal Ouellet, the Archbishop of Quebec, published a pastoral message concerning the Army of Mary in which he warned those who were sympathetic to it and its members about the risks that were involved. I am giving you a copy of this.

Cardinal Ouellet mentioned in particular the writings of Marc Bosquart who expounds a teaching based on Mrs. Giguère’s mystical experiences which have never been recognized by the competent authorities of the Church.

You will find in it difficulties regarding the person of the Virgin Mary who is presented as being "co-eternal with the eternal God", difficulties regarding the person of the foundress, Mrs. Giguère, considered as the feminine equivalent to the Redeemer, etc.

There are serious doctrinal problems which were the reason for the warnings issued by the
Canadian bishops. Now, the private revelations received by an individual (and there have been some in the Church’s long history) or apparitions cannot contradict revealed doctrine.

The interpellations addressed to the Sons of Mary do not come from one single bishop who could have misunderstood, or not heard or interpreted things correctly, but from a group of bishops who have been repeating their warnings. They have done it within the context of their episcopal responsibility and in communion with the Pope.

Many of the members of the Army of Mary in the Oise region are unaware of these teachings. Quite a few of them, in good faith and true devotion, participate in the recitation of the rosary, times of Eucharistic adoration, the presentation of an encyclical from the Pope. And all of that is good. But that is not all there is.

I am concerned over the fact that those in charge of this Community do not accept the bishops’ decision and they continue to publish in their paper articles which are contrary to Christian doctrine, refusing to listen to what they are being told, in particular, by Archbishop Prendergast, the Archbishop of Halifax in Canada, the Pontifical Commissioner appointed for the Community of the Sons of Mary. Now, the ministry of ordained priests must be exercised with respect for the unity of the Catholic faith.

The superiors of the Community of the Sons of Mary base themselves on the esteem enjoyed by the priests from Grandfresnoy to say: “one judges a tree by its fruit; how can one condemn a work that bears good fruit?” But what are the fruits of apostolic work? Christ speaks of a “fruit that must endure” (Jn 15:16). These fruits are tested over time and in trials. One of our references in discernment are the words from the Apostle Paul: “what the Spirit brings is...: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control.” (Gal 5:22)

Christians from the sectors of Grandfresnoy and Chevrières have told me of their sadness over the Community’s departure and their worries about the celebrations already set for the coming months. I thank Father Grenier and the priests of the Compiègne region in particular for their solicitude in organizing the Christian community’s life, in celebrating the baptisms and marriages already arranged as well as the funerals, and in being available for the other Eucharistic celebrations and Sunday Masses. Father Grenier will also meet with the Christians in that sector involved in the parish ministry.

This event is a trial. We will have to offer guidance to some people who may be disconcerted by this situation, preparing them to welcome fraternally the priests who will be appointed in the parish of Saint Joseph de la Plaine d’Estrées. We will need to help the Christians with whom we will meet retain what is good from the ministry and the teachings of the Sons of Mary and recognize that which is contrary to the faith. We will have to encourage them in their devotion to Our Lady, in Eucharistic adoration and in their confidence in the Church.

We pray for the Sons of Mary whom we have known here, for the Christians in this sector and their families. May the Virgin Mary, Mother of Good Counsel and Mother of Mercy, intercede for all.

+ Jean-Paul James