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What would Marie Rivier do?

Epidemics in the History of the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary

Marie Rivier from Bourg, to Sr M-Caroline in Bordeaux on July 28, 1835 :

"My dearest daughter, you might be frightened to hear that cholera is so widespread in the South of France. Alas! it is wreaking terrible havoc, in Toulon, Marseille, Aix; it has begun again in Arles and has appeared in many other places. But, thanks be to God, not here yet. Pray with fervor to our God that he will continue this favor and preserve all our poor sisters of the South, especially Mèze, Salon, Gréoulx, etc. How irritated the Lord is and how terrible this scourge is! In Marseilles, the soldiers of the garrison offered to walk the procession barefoot, as they prepared to carry Notre Dame de la Gard. "(Letter n°1178(2)-6).

Marie Rivier to Sr Zozime in Bordeaux St Martial, August 7, 1835 :

"We pray a lot for the conversion of the world and ask our God to preserve us from the scourge of cholera, fiat! "(Letter n° 1243(40)-7).

Exchange of letters and news - tears and affliction

Long suffering of the sick and agony - parish priest and sister victims

People are fleeing, so are children - deserted cities

The Sisters take refuge in the homes of parishioners or notable 'protectors'.

they are strong, reasonable, courageous and generous

They are given the order to accept help, money: to be reimbursed later

As long as the epidemic lasts...

Now, the cholera is close to us! Serious concern for those in charge.

Alais is filled with foreigners ... surely cholera will be declared there!

The Parish Priest, Mr. Mayor, Mr. Baron, manager of the baths of Gréoux,

oblige the sisters to go to the baths for a change of air.

Sharing - consolation and encouragement: they opened their purses to them.

The sisters are dedicated to the service of people who have cholera

Taking care of others: children, those with cholera, little orphan girl.

Marie Rivier from Bourg, to Sr. Xavier at la Chaldettes, Chaudes-Aigues, Cantal, August 13, 1835 :

"We are in serious trouble here. No doubt you already know, my dear daughter, that cholera is still wreaking great havoc in the South and now it is close to us because it is in Tulette, in Bagnols, fiat! Our poor Sisters of Gréoux who, after the loss of Sister Sainte-Anne also lost Sister Cyprienne, on the 6th of the month, took refuge in the building for baths.

Those of Tour-d'Aigues, after attending the funeral of their Pastor, went to the home of a respectable and holy family in the countryside.

The scourge is also in Grambois, Mèze and half an hour from Salon. Those who are fleeing carry it elsewhere: Avignon, Nîmes, Beaucaire and all the surrounding areas. Alais is filled with strangers: it will surely declare itself there as well! God be blessed in everything!

Most of our sisters have asked me to dedicate themselves to the service of those stricken by cholera. Sister Sainte-Anne, without having had the opportunity, has the merit before God, because she had asked me to do so, and my answer did not reach her until after her death.
"(Letter no. 387 - 3)

The communication between Mother Rivier and the sisters in their different local communities was constant. More and more Sisters were taking care of the people infected, especially the poor and the abandoned. Mother Rivier saw to it that the orphans were also well taken care of. If possible, the students were to be kept in the school so as not to see all the misery around them and to keep them happy. We praise God in his mercy, for more and more Sisters have asked to dedicate their lives to care of the cholera victims.

At the height of the pandemic, Mother Rivier left the sisters free to make the choice: caring for the victims of cholera or taking refuge with our Sisters in the Grand Bois. The Annals make mention of the Sisters who were infected with cholera but cared so well for others until the very end. The Annals recorded only two of our sisters who contracted the disease and died: Sr. Sœur Sainte-Anne and Sœur Cyprienne.

Not only was Mother Rivier in constant communication with her daughters, but she was also directing from Bourg the necessary transfers and changes of Sisters in order to replace those who had chosen to take refuge. Her guidance was precise, compassionate and loving. She saw that no one was neglected. The parishes should not be abandoned during this time of great suffering!