

Malines, 24th May 1808

Pupil at the boarding school, Montdidier.

My dear Nephew,

I read your letter of the 13th of this month with pleasure. Each day you find yourself at the foot of the mountain which you will set to climbing each day with renewed courage. Ah well, that's the way to get to the summit without knowing it, and this ignorance is your joy. It is singular, no doubt, that man only climbs this mountain by first descending into the depths of his wretchedness and his daily infidelities; subject every day to confusion and humiliation, but each day having new courage, new efforts and a strong and total faith in the help of grace. Yes, my dear nephew, all those who wish to advance in virtue must be persuaded that they are only just beginning, and that they have to start each day with yet more courage knowing that they are a day nearer the end of the journey. Thus did the great Apostle excite the faithful of Rome to fervour: my brothers, he says, The moment is here for you to stop sleeping a wake up because by now our salvation is nearer than when we first started to believe.¹ If we had much fervour then, how much more should we now have, as the night of our mortal life comes nigh and the day of happy eternity approaches: nox processit dies autem appropinquavit.

You must sacrifice to the Good Lord's pleasure your desire to work in the countryside. He alone has the right to assign to you the place He wishes and the use He requires of His grace. I had the same desire when I was a young ecclesiastic, but Providence decided otherwise. May His holy Name be blessed. I have no idea what He will do with me in my old age. There will be another Archbishop and I do not know what he will do with me. So my future is in the hands of the Lord and I ask for the help of your prayers that He might let me know His holy will and give me the grace not to deviate from it.

At the moment our Archbishop is in Paris; he will return for Pentecost and for the ordinations. His successor is the current Bishop of Poitiers² whom we already know by his good reputation.

Recommend to your brother that he should not forget that virtue is always necessary if one is to seek salvation and to be worthy of the Lord's blessings. During his time at boarding school he should be strengthened by this idea so that in later life he can resist the torrent of vice which exists in the world.

My holy daughters pray for you and for your interests.

I have the honour to call myself, with the sentiments of a sincere love in Our Lord Jesus Christ,

My dear nephew!

Your very humble and obedient servant,

JG Huleu

¹ Romans 13:11.

² Dominique Dufour de Pradt, Bishop of Senlis and Chaplain to Napoleon Bonaparte. He would never formally be recognised as Archbishop.