

Inside the Legion of Mary – On Legionary Devotion

Interior Life of the Legionary

By Father Francis J. Peffley

Although the section *The Interior Life of the Legionary* is one of the more recent additions to the handbook, its principle and intent were present from the very beginning of the Legion, as is seen in its basic purpose: the sanctification of the member. It deals with the balance between the apostolic life and the contemplative life. On the surface, legionary life is presumed to be one of action, one of outreach and evangelization. It is often rightly included in the lists of “apostolic” organizations in the Church. But the Legion of Mary differs from these “active” organizations by its emphasis on the need for its members to develop an interior or spiritual life along with its organizational life.

What is the spiritual life? It is the indwelling of the Blessed Trinity in the soul through the living presence of Christ in his Mystical Body. St. Paul, so overcome with his awareness of this indwelling, exclaimed, “It is no longer I, but Christ who lives in me!” It is St. Basil who said, “By Baptism we become the flesh of Christ.” The spiritual life is the assuming by the Second Person of the Trinity of a continuing human nature in the individual soul. Just as he says of the bread, through the priest at Mass, “This is my Body,” so he says, in the soul of the individual human nature, “This is my body.” It is the conscious “living along” with Christ living within us that is the interior, spiritual life the Legion hopes for its members. This is not merely pious instruction on the part of the Legion, but is the actual teaching of the Church.

So the mission of legionaries is twofold: to become one with Christ who lives within them and to seek and serve Christ in all the people of the world. He must increase and they must decrease, becoming Christ-like, becoming like Jesus as he continues to live his life through them.

The handbook says all holiness consists in doing the will of God. Jesus said, “I have not come to do my will but the will of him who sent me.” And the Blessed Mother’s response was “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word.” Maximilian Kolbe’s phrase was, “Holiness is when our will equals the will of God.” Mary perfectly did the will of the Father, as did all the saints. But what is the Will of God? The great spiritual writers divide the Will of God into two parts: The “Signified Will of God” (The Ten Commandments, the Precepts of the Church and the Duties of one’s State of Life) and “The Will of God’s Good Pleasure” or “God’s Permissive Will” (the sequence of events in daily life; the circumstances, incidents and persons involved in each present moment). Everything that happens, everything that is, is God’s Will. Holiness consists in seeing and obeying his Will from moment to moment, day by day the best we can.

With reference to the document *Christifidelis Laici* by John Paul II, the handbook offers these thoughts: Growth in holiness is aided by listening to the Word of God, by fervent and constant prayer, by spiritual direction (usually a good confessor), and by discerning and using the talents given to one by God. It says that the Legion in a unique way gives spiritual direction and formation at the praesidium level through its system of handbook, allocutio, meeting and assignment, which will greatly help the members in the development of their holiness by expecting of them the spirit of sacrifice of time and effort, and the humble obedience in accepting assignments and doing them in the legionary way. Once members are aware that the Legion's rules and practices are God's Will for them, and is their particular "custom-made" calling to holiness, their interior life will be what the Legion hopes it to be. I like to think – when that roll is called "up yonder" – that they will discover they are of the same tradition as that of the great Religious Orders: the saints of the Franciscans, the saints of the Dominicans, and the saints of The Legion of Mary.