

## *Inside the Legion of Mary - On Legionary Devotion*

### **The Acies**

By Father Francis J. Peffley

The Acies is the single most important Legion event of the year, held around the 25<sup>th</sup> of March, feast of the Annunciation, which commemorates the Incarnation, when God became man and totally dependent on our Blessed Mother. In one sense it can be said that when he entrusted himself to Mary for nine months in her womb he “consecrated” himself to her as we do in the Acies ceremony.

*Acies* is a Latin word meaning “an army set in battle array.” So we have to picture a great army gathered together – in contrast to the word *praesidium*, which is a small military outpost or garrison. At the Acies all the local Legion “outposts” get together as an army set in battle array under the patronage and banner of the Virgin Mary, to renew their love and devotion to her for another year. And just as the handbook says that the grace is given to perform the assignment each week at the *praesidium* meeting, so the grace for the legionary’s upcoming year’s battle against evil is given at his attendance at the Acies. The importance of this is emphasized in that section of the handbook which states that if any legionaries could attend the Acies but do not, they have little or none of the spirit of the Legion in them, and are no asset to the Legion! Hence we can see why the Legion considers this to be the most important event of the entire Legion year.

I like to use the acrostic A – C – I – E – S to help understand the full significance of the Acies Consecration: A – annual; C – consecration; I – interior; E – exterior; S – self (*the Annual Consecration of our Interior and Exterior Self*). First, it is *annual*, which gives special emphasis to it, such as an annual retreat, a significant anniversary or even New Year’s Day when we make resolutions and look to the year ahead. Secondly – *consecration*, the giving of ourselves completely to the Blessed Mother by consecrating (i.e. “to set aside”) our time and effort in the coming year to her service. Third, the consecration includes the giving of our *interior* self: our thoughts, our past, present and future, our graces, merits – everything that makes us what we are – soul, mind, heart, is consecrated to Our Lady. The *exterior* self means our material possessions, our work, our health, our finances, our family – all the things we possess externally are entrusted to Our Lady as well.

The handbook describes what the ceremony consists of: the gathering together in the Church where the full Legion altar is set up with statue, flowers, candles – but minus the vexillum which is replaced by a processional model in front of the main altar; the legionaries approach and place their hand upon it as they say the words “*I am all yours, my Queen and my Mother, and all that I have is yours.*” This is preceded by an opening hymn, Legion prayers and rosary and a talk by a

priest on the significance of the consecration. Spiritual Directors, Active members and any Auxiliary members who have been preparing and are ready can make the act of consecration. It should be noted that Auxiliary members invited to the Acies should be instructed in its importance and prepared to make this consecration and made aware of the True Devotion to Mary. The handbook emphasizes that we should put the fullest expression of our gratitude and understanding into those words of consecration. This would indicate that it not be mechanical or a routine phrase but audible and with great faith and devotion.

An organ plays softly during the procession to the vexillum; after each legionary completes the consecration with a slight bow and returns to the pew, the priest reads a collective act of consecration on behalf of all present, consecrating them to Our Lady. The Catena and Benediction of the Most Blessed Sacrament (or sometimes Holy Mass) is followed by the concluding Legion prayers and a final hymn. There is usually a reception in the church hall.

I recommend preparing for the Acies collectively and personally. As a praesidium, plan to read the Marian Synthesis from the handbook a couple weeks before the Acies; it is a beautiful explanation of Our Lady's role in salvation history. The section on the Acies should also be read the week before the ceremony. Those preparing to make the True Devotion Consecration on March 25 can use that as preparation for the Acies. Reading the True Devotion, or the thirty-three day preparation book and then applying that to the Acies consecration would be very rewarding. And for individual legionaries I recommend meditating on the formula of consecration by emphasizing word by word: *I* am all yours, I *am* all yours, I am *all* yours, etc. Every day meditate with emphasis on the word that follows: what does it mean to say, I am all *Yours*; *my* Queen, my *Mother*. Meditating on these words daily in this manner makes every word a prayer, and will make the consecration itself a truly enriching moment in legionary life.