

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

### **The Legion Prayers**

By Father Francis J. Peffley

*The soul of the Legion is shown forth in its prayers*, says the handbook, the soul being the principle of life. So without the prayers a Legion meeting would not be a living meeting, and without saying the Legion prayers a legionary would not have living membership. The prayers are what keep the spirit of the legionaries alive.

The Legion prayers on the tessera are divided into three sections – Opening Prayers, the Catena Legionis, and the Concluding Prayers – in order to regulate the agenda of the praesidium meeting. These prayers contain much beauty and rich theology, and are a source of many graces and indulgences whenever they are prayed. For every Active legionary these prayers are not just for the meeting, but should be part of their daily spiritual life. Of course, the Catena is a daily obligation for all legionaries Active and Auxiliary – the rosary and other prayers being optional for the Active members – but I suggest the Opening and Concluding Prayers be incorporated into daily legionary life by saying, for example, the Opening prayers upon waking in the morning and ending the day with the Concluding prayers. Like a Chinese gong which is kept humming with an occasional tap, these daily prayers can keep the legionary in tune and connected with the spirit and mission of the Legion between meetings and assignments.

The Opening Prayers are directed to the Holy Spirit, the fire of love, who ignites our motivation to become holy and to spread the Faith. The very first words ever prayed at a Legion meeting were “Come, Holy Spirit” back in 1921, and every Legion meeting since has opened with those words. The next prayer is taken from the Mass of Pentecost Sunday: “God our Father, pour out the gifts of your Holy Spirit on the world,” which shows the Legion’s connection to the sacred liturgy.

Then follows the rosary, the major legionary prayer; one of the Church’s greatest sacramentals and a most effective weapon against evil whether recited alone or with a group. St. Louis de Montfort says if you pray the rosary alone, there is the benefit of having said one rosary; if said with ten people it’s as if you had said ten rosaries! A Plenary Indulgence can be gained every time the rosary is said in a group setting – provided all the other conditions are met (Mass, communion, confession within a week before or after, prayer for the Pope and detachment from all sin). The Opening Prayers end with a short litany to Jesus, Mary and some patron saints, reminding the legionaries what exalted company is found within the Legion family.

The Catena, meaning “chain”, is the prayer that links some twenty million legionaries – Active and Auxiliary – with the Blessed Mother and each other. It is her own canticle, the Magnificat, with scriptural antiphons and a closing prayer referring to her as Mediatrix of all Graces. It can be stated (as it is with the Mass) that there is no moment in time – day or night – when this prayer is not being prayed somewhere in the world!

Although the final prayer of the tessera is called a “Concluding Prayer”, it can actually be considered a commencement or commissioning prayer, a “sending forth,” as in the Mass when we hear, “Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.” Through this prayer legionaries are sent forth from their meetings to bring Christ to the world and the world to Christ. It is a fact that Frank Duff is the composer of the Legion prayers, but when we consider the Concluding Prayer St. Louis de Montfort must be considered as having a part in its composition. In his book, “The True Devotion,” can be seen parallel sentences to the Concluding Prayer, sometimes almost word for word. Acknowledging de Montfort as the “tutor” of the Legion, Frank Duff with some adaptation passed on to the Legion the spiritual thought of its teacher and patron saint.

The Concluding Prayer is a supplication for an increase in the virtue of *faith*, and pleads for it five different times. Our Lady sends out her legionaries to do great things, but great deeds require one thing above all – faith, not *merely* faith but *fullness* of faith – which, of course, is the Catholic Faith, leading on to fearless and undoubting trust.

The second appeal is for a *lively faith*, living, active, animated by charity. Just like the great Religious Orders of old, legionaries are asked to perform all their actions from the motive of pure love for God and sincere love of neighbor. This is the fundamental motivation for Legion membership. There might be other reasons for being a legionary – the gratification of belonging to a mutual interest group; the making of new friends; doing the satisfying works of the Legion or receiving its wonderful blessings – but the main reason for doing the work or coming to the meeting should be our pure love for Christ and his Mother.

The third request is for a *firm* faith, *immovable as a rock*, which connects our thoughts to the God of the psalms who is our rock of refuge, and to Peter, the rock on which the True Church is founded. Like the man in the gospel who built his house on rock, legionary faith should stand steadfast and *tranquil* through the day to day storms of suffering, trial and disappointment in both legionary and personal life. To endure trial tranquility is the hallmark of true legionary faith and trust.

A *courageous faith* is next, very much needed by legionaries as they pursue souls for Christ, a faith that inspires the undertaking of great things for God’s glory without hesitation: *Should we dare propose confession to this fallen away Catholic? Can we ask this couple married out of the Church if they would like to*

*see a priest? Should we try to explain the Eucharist to this staunch Presbyterian?* The answer is always yes, and without hesitation.

Finally there is the call for *faith* like a *Pillar of Fire*, turning legionaries into living copies of Our Lady, the pillar of Divine Love, as on the tessera picture, radiating light and warmth into the darkness of ignorance and sin. Legionaries, on their assignments, are like the Pillar of Fire in the Old Testament, leading wayward souls to their promised land of heaven. When we share our portion of the fire of Divine Love it is not diminished but is actually increased. The flame is not lost when given to somebody else – there is twice as much light, a brighter flame, which, when the battle of life has ended, will *guide our own feet in the Way of Peace* to our heavenly home in the kingdom of God's love and glory.

So it all comes down to eternity and heaven and the reason we are here: to prove our love for God and neighbor. Edel Quinn has said we have only a short time on earth to prove our love for God: through the Legion of Mary prayers we are shown how.