

Inside the Legion of Mary – On Legionary Membership

Praetorian Membership

By Father Francis J. Peffley

We are well aware of the basic degrees of Active and Auxiliary membership in our day-to-day living of the Legion way of life, but what is less noticed are the companion degrees of membership: the Praetorian for Active and the Adjutorian for Auxiliary status. Both are of great importance but I will focus at this time on the Praetorian degree.

The section on Praetorians in the handbook recommends that every Active member consider, at some point, undertaking this degree of membership. The Latin word *praetorian* comes from Roman Legion times, designating the Imperial bodyguard protecting the Emperor. They were the hand-picked special forces relied upon to uphold the ideals and order of Roman society. Frank Duff, in forming the Legion of Mary, found this a ready term for those members whom he knew would desire to give more to Our Lady, who would see the need to deepen their prayer life as they progressed in their Legion membership. The four qualifications he laid down for Praetorians are not difficult but are not for everyone, since lay Catholic life differs with each member.

The first requirement is *the recitation of the complete Legion prayers on the prayer card every day*. It is not a duty of Active members to say the full Legion prayers and rosary every day, (though most legionaries do) but they are expected to say the Catena daily – the only prayer obligation for Active members. But the Praetorian member says the entire tessera every day.

The second requirement is *the praying of five decades of the rosary every day*.

The third requirement is *daily Mass and Holy Communion*. This is the most important aspect of Praetorian membership, and for some members, because of particular life styles, the most difficult to achieve. It is the most important because it supports the main purpose of the Legion – to grow in the spiritual life, to intensify our union with Our Lord in the Eucharist and to become saints. Frank Duff knew the human condition and allowed for the need to meet limitations in life, since the handbook says it would be acceptable for Praetorian membership to have to miss Mass one or two days in the week.

The remaining requirement is *the recitation of some form of an approved Office of the Church*. This would include a substantial part of the Liturgy of the Hours or of the Christian Prayer volume (Morning and Evening Prayer), or the Shorter Christian Prayer. Also acceptable would be the Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Little Office of the Immaculate Conception, or the official Legion of Mary Breviary. (Legionaries who are Third Order Dominicans are allowed to

substitute fifteen decades of the rosary, and Third Order Franciscans the twelve Our Fathers, Hail Marys and Glory Be to the Fathers). Any of these suffice for Praetorian membership.

The ideal in this degree of membership is to have the legionaries grow into the practice of praying with the Church, praying the official prayer of the Church, the Divine Office, which means “the work of God”. When praying the Psalms we participate in the very prayer of Christ, the same Psalms that Jesus, Mary and Joseph knew and read. The Divine Office, or the Liturgy of the Hours, is a higher form of prayer than the private prayer of our personal devotions. By reciting these Psalms we allow Jesus to pray through us as he lives on in us through history in the Catholic Church. Regardless of the type of office used, Praetorian membership opens a deeper life of prayer and reflection and will increase the sense of the Legion vocation to sainthood.

Although the Praetorian is a deeper degree of membership than standard Active membership, it has no reference to the quality of Legion spirit possessed by the Praetorian in relation to the other members of the praesidium. The unannounced roll of the Praetorians is kept by the Vice President and is not referred to during meetings, but the number is included in the reports to the higher council.

There is the usual probation or adjustment period as with probationary Active membership but with no obligation to commit to it. After three months the Vice President will inquire as to the progress of the Praetorian, and if satisfactory the name will be added to the roll. Of course, nothing is binding under pain of sin. Failing to keep up at times with the requirements is normal and expected, since this is the perfecting of membership, not the preserving of membership. The handbook says: *The Legion expects much from the praetorian degree. It will lead many members onto a life in closer union with God through prayer. It will mean the incorporation in the Legion system of a heart of prayer in which more and more legionaries will tend to bury themselves. Archbishop Leen told his legionaries, “As grace develops in us, our love must take on new forms.”* The reciting of the entire Divine Office, for those in a position to do it, would represent such an expansion of love.