

Inside the Legion of Mary – On Legionary Spirit

The Object of the Legion

By Father Francis J. Peffley

When the question is asked, “What is the Legion of Mary?” the answer given is usually about the praesidium meeting and the types of work done, or how much is gotten out of it, etc. This is an appropriate answer but it actually misses the mark and also the opportunity for apostleship. First and foremost, the answer should somehow include the *object* of the Legion, the *purpose* for which it exists, and that is *the Glory of God*; and the way we give glory to God is by being holy. So the answer to the question, “What is the Legion of Mary?” should be something like “The Legion is my expression of the Catholic vocation,” or “The Legion is my way to holiness!” An answer like that gets attention and immediately puts before the mind of the questioner the *purpose* of the Legion and indirectly becomes a reminder to the inquirer about the *purpose of life* – to be holy.

To be holy means to be happy and that is why God created us. He wanted to share his happiness with us. God did not need us; he is perfectly happy in and of himself and yet he created us so that we could be happy for all eternity. Happiness comes from being true to the nature God intended. Everything in nature gives glory to him by its natural existence: when birds fly or fish swim they give glory to God. Everything in nature gives glory to God *naturally*, but man is called to give glory to God *supernaturally* as well, through an act of the will, through following the commandments, and loving God and neighbor. That’s how we fulfill our vocation, our destiny. So the holier people are, the more glory they give to God. That’s why Mary says, “My soul glorifies the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.” The saints gave God the greatest glory, because they fulfilled their true destiny, which is to get to heaven, to be like Christ and to become a saint.

Christ is the perfect pattern for everyone to follow; the more a person is Christ-like, the more glory is given to the heavenly Father. It is the pattern assumed by the Legion of Mary to develop holiness in its members and it is applied in two ways: prayer and active work. The Legion is very much aware of the need for prayer in the life of its members and encourages the acquiring and practice of a genuine personal life of prayer in addition to that which is fostered through its system, such as the praesidium prayers and rosary, the spiritual reading, guidance gained from the allocutio, Praetorian membership, prayers said by partners on assignment and the practice of a true devotion to Mary.

This Christ-like pattern is emphasized in the Vatican Council documents regarding the priest as “another Christ”, where the subject is the holiness of priests. By performing the duties that are imposed upon him – saying Mass,

hearing confessions, performing weddings, funerals, and baptisms, visiting the sick – the priest is sanctified. It is in the doing of his apostolic work, in conjunction with his prayer life, that the priest fulfills his vocation. The same thing applies to legionaries who are also sanctified by doing apostolic work expected of them in their membership. Even if assignments show no great contacts, and conversions and returns to the sacraments are fewer than expected, or if assignments are not to our liking or we feel inadequate in doing them – it's all in Our Lady's sanctifying hands. Our job is to be faithful, not successful, as Mother Teresa always said. Legionaries are actual cooperators in Mary's and the Church's work of crushing the head of the serpent and advancing the reign of Christ. This is not a mere pious statement thought up by the founder of the Legion, but is an actual fact of the authentic mission of the Church and the true legionary vocation.

Someone has said we are all diamonds in the rough. To show forth the brilliance hidden beneath the "rough," a diamond must be cut and faceted, shaped and made to fit its custom mount. Legionaries are Our Lady's jewels, her "diamonds in the rough," and they will be aware that they are fulfilling the "Object of the Legion" as they accept and allow her cutting and shaping, polishing and perfecting their Legion of Mary membership and their personal legionary lives.