

Inside the Legion of Mary – On Legionary Spirit

Tips for Apostleship

By Father Francis J. Peffley

In the word *Apostle*, when broken down by letter, can be found helpful insights for legionaries. To be an apostle one has to be a person of A – *Action*. Think of what would have happened to the early Church had not the apostles been men of action. If they had kept the Faith to themselves – prayed and worshipped – but had not gone about preaching and evangelizing, the Gospel would never have been spread. Legionaries, by the apostolic nature of their organization, are meant to be men and women of action. There is no spreading of the Faith without actually being face-to-face with real live people. Evangelization is not in the attending of meetings of committees to discuss possibilities; evangelization is, rather, the making of the possibilities possible! To actually do a definite assigned work every week by knocking on doors, visiting homes, going to the shut-ins, is apostolic action. I knew of a church in which there was an evangelization committee that met every month for three years; once a year they held a weekend project. It was mostly talk and no action. Legionaries are heirs to the legacy of Frank Duff, a man of action, and action means *life*. What is active has life. Think of a stagnant pool with no activity and one with a current flowing through it, alive and fresh.

P in *apostle* stands for *prayer*. Obviously we need to be persons of action like Martha, but we also need to be persons of prayer like Mary. As Mother Teresa said, for Jesus to be served perfectly Martha and Mary must be combined. Legionaries must be a Martha and Mary model of apostolic service, a two-sided medal of prayer and action that will enrich both the legionaries and their contacts. In his book, *The Soul of the Apostolate*, Dom Chautard says that prayer is the soul for every apostolate; an apostolate without prayer will be like a dead body. For legionaries, then, to have action that is fruitful, it has to flow from a strong and genuine life of prayer.

The next letter in *apostle* is O and stands for *ownership*. This means that good apostles will see the Church as if it were their own. It is not enough to participate in parish activities. By reading and learning about the true Church they come to love it and will want to defend it, consider it their own, take a real interest in its life and feel hurt when it is attacked or criticized. And they will want to see it grow. They will not be like the 10:00 to 5:00 employee who puts in time for the company but has interests elsewhere, but rather they will be like the industrious secretary who has an interest in the business and works as if it were her own. This sense of ownership for the Church will not make the laity bishops or cardinals but will give them a true, personal vocation, a genuine Catholic way of life. Legionaries, by their meetings, works, and formation are already “Professed” in the apostolic vocation of the Church.

The letter S in *apostle* stands for *system*. Most people will not be apostolic on their own. The individual apostle is rarely found in the Church. It is unfortunate that most Catholics do not feel the need to evangelize, and should they be interested, there would be a definite need for some sort of support group. I wonder how many legionaries would be out visiting the sick or going door to door if they weren't in the Legion? I recall two legionaries who did prison visitation in a praesidium that disbanded. They assured the curia that they would continue the work on their own, to keep a Catholic volunteer presence in the prison, which they did for a few weeks. But within three months there were no more visits to the prison. Without the system of the Legion to support their evangelizing spirit and to supply the grace for the work, the former legionaries lost the incentive to be apostolic. Legionaries should be most grateful for the providential gift of their Legion membership. It is not the only evangelizing organization in the Church, but is probably the most effective system and support group for the majority of Catholics. With its master and apprentice system, its regular routine of meeting and assignment, its spiritualizing influence on the member, it continues to produce countless apostles – not to mention saints! – throughout the world.

The next letter is T for *techniques* and *treasures*. The techniques refer to what to say and how to say it, and the treasures are what the Catholic Church has to offer souls. Frank Duff emphasized the importance of talking about the great treasures of the Catholic Church on Legion assignments whenever possible. Not every assignment is suitable to apply the “techniques and treasures” approach, but the awareness of them and the importance of making them known should be in the legionary mind on every assignment. Techniques can be acquired and developed that can make every contact a Catholic contact. The list of treasures to be made known to others begins with *The Holy Eucharist; the Seven Sacraments; the Catholic Church as the one true Church founded by Christ; the Papacy, the unbroken chain linked back to Peter; Our Lady as spiritual mother of each and every human being*, and many others. Legionaries should make it their business to know how to speak about the treasures of the Church, which is the living presence of Jesus Christ through history, who lives in them as they go out to share these treasures. There can be no greater act on the part of the legionary than to offer people the invitation to become Catholic – or to become a better Catholic – and no more important duty on assignments than to try to talk about Catholic things, about the great blessings that fill a Catholic's life, and *lovingly* invite others to share in their joy.

The second to last letter in *Apostle* is L and – you guessed it – it stands for *Love*. St. Paul reminds us that without love we are nothing, and our apostolate will bear little fruit if we are delinquent in love. Legionaries should be conscious of the maxim: *Love is in the will*. It is possible to *love* others without *liking* their manner, appearance, words or actions. Legionaries prove their love by the effort and sacrifice made in preparing and doing the assignment, often by patiently enduring unresponsive people or disappointing situations, and by indiscriminately visiting or approaching all those involved in their assignments. From the earliest

catechism they know that God created them to know him and to love him in others, and from the handbook that the secret of influence is love. Legionary love for the people visited or contacted is expressed by showing sincere and tender interest and service, but also by their interior attitude of seeing Christ in everyone and intending their eternal happiness.

Lastly, E stands for *Extend*. True apostles will be ongoing in trying to extend and multiply themselves by recruiting new members and by working to start new praesidia. But legionaries must realize their unique calling, which is to extend the Motherhood of Mary. Vatican II said all apostolic work comes under Our Lady's special patronage; but the Legion goes further and sees itself as a kind of "mystical body" of Mary, a local presence of her, loving and serving Jesus today. Everyone knows Mary appeared in Mexico, Lourdes and Fatima in the form of a lovely woman, leaving her message and returning to heaven; the Legion believes she appeared in Dublin in 1921, in the form of the Legion of Mary, and is still here, working in the world through her legionaries who are the extension of her Motherhood of all mankind.