

Inside the Legion of Mary – On Legionary Work

Doing Difficult Works

By Father Francis J. Peffley

The handbook is emphatic about the need for legionaries to attempt a work they feel could be above their ability, outside the apparent possibility of success or even dangerous; it says the Legion is a system that is *designed* to do challenging and difficult work. Faith and experience have proven that not only can the Legion do great things but that it can actually thrive on doing them! From the very beginning the Legion has been involved and successful in works that have been challenging to human nature and actually dangerous.

The very first assignment given to legionaries was to visit a hospital – not usually considered a challenging work – but most challenging for the young women going on their first assignment, for in those years (the nineteen-twenties) hospitals were not as we have them today. The Dublin Union “hospital” consisted of dreary wards of cancer patients in all stages of the disease, without the benefit of sterile, modern-day care, hopeful treatments or medicines. They lingered or writhed in their pain accompanied by the unnerving sounds of agony and hopelessness in spite of the caring Sisters of Our Lady of Mercy. The first legionaries overcame their nausea and revulsion for the conditions they faced and found the souls beneath the suffering bodies and discovered the Legion way to holiness.

And then there was Bentley Place, which had an international reputation for prostitution, vice and crime, existing in an isolated, derelict district of Dublin for over two hundred years and ignored by both secular and religious authorities. The fear and foreboding status it presented for the rest of Dublin city was because of stories about people said to have entered that area and were never seen again! It had its own criminal government something like the Mafia and was estimated to have over two hundred and fifty women “working” in that eight-block area. Frank Duff, one priest and several young legionaries – with total trust in Our Lady – entered that territory and began visiting the houses where the prostitutes lived, inviting the girls to an enclosed retreat! Indeed, there was danger! But the legionaries were able to influence thirty of the girls to make that retreat, and in the end not one of them returned to their former way of life! It’s all in the book “Miracles on Tap”, a marvelous story of the miracle Our Lady worked through the Legion, for within four years Bentley Place was closed down – something which neither the government nor the Church had been able to do. I recommend that everyone – especially legionaries – read Frank Duff’s “Miracles on Tap”, told in his own words.

The Legion has continued working in this spirit in many parts of the world. In the “Skidrow” area of Chicago for over thirty years legionaries have reached out to a destitute population of the homeless, drunks, drug addicts and prostitutes.

And in Dublin, every Friday and Saturday night, legionaries do “The Late Night Picket” for two or three hours from eleven p.m. to two a.m., contacting the men and women who roam the dark and dangerous streets. There is a place in the area where a priest waits inside for legionaries to “make a catch” and bring to him a soul in need of confession, someone needing counseling, or even an unbelieving challenger!

These examples typify the exhortation of the handbook which says that if the work needs to be done for the salvation of souls, then legionaries – making sure that things are as safe as possible – should undertake it. It stresses that the Legion must be in the *forefront* of the Church’s battle for souls. It should be remembered that we belong to a Church Suffering in purgatory, a Church Triumphant in heaven, and a Church Militant on earth – a part of which is the Legion of Mary. There is a real war with evil, a battle for souls, a martial warfare, and legionaries should be in the front trenches, attacking the great evils of today’s society. The way it’s done is to look upon each and every person with the realization that he is made in the image and likeness of God, has an immortal soul and that Christ died for him individually. Even though they be hostile to the Catholic Church or luring people away from it, the goal is to convert those persons. It must never be forgotten that the devil wants their soul – as well as every legionary’s soul – in hell and that we must fight the battle for the salvation of those souls for Christ. This battle is a *reality* and not merely a pious exhortation, and it applies not only to the difficult Legion works but to *every* Legion work: the patient in the nursing home, the little child being taught CCD, a nurse or doctor met on hospital visits, each person met doing door-to-door. It must be realized that the soul was purchased by the blood of Christ and we must do everything we can to bring each one we meet to full union with Christ through the practice of the Catholic Faith.