

Inside the Legion of Mary – On Legionary Work

The Patricians

By Father Francis J. Peffley

The Patricians, although categorized as a work of the Legion, can actually be called an adult education program run by the Legion. Though sounding Irish, it is a Latin word adapted from old Roman society when there were the Slaves the Plebs and the Patricians, who were the educated citizens of the empire. The idea of the Legion of Mary Patricians is to interest and educate Catholics in the true Faith: to increase their knowledge, to give them the experience and ability to explain the Faith to others – to be able to speak up and talk about Catholic things in public – and to encourage them to become apostles.

The handbook calls attention to the two greatest problems in the Church today: the Catholics' lack of knowledge about their religion and their inhibition and inability to explain or even talk about it with others. The Legion goes directly to the heart of the problem by offering the Patricians.

It is not a lecture system. When people go to a lecture they sit, listen to an expert or specialist on a subject, and go away remembering perhaps ten or twenty percent of what they heard. At a Patricians meeting those present hear a short non-professional talk on some Catholic topic followed by free discussion among the listeners; after this comes a follow-up talk by a priest and further discussion. It has been noted that those attending will remember eighty, ninety, or one hundred percent of what they heard because of being mentally and actively involved in the experience. The Patricians not only teaches the Faith, but provides an opportunity for shedding shyness and building confidence in order to express that Faith, which is the necessary step in becoming apostolic.

The Patricians is not open to non-Catholics nor to the dissenting “anti-Catholic Catholic”, but is designed for the average parishioner – those who perhaps are neither devout nor practicing but “broadly” Catholic as the handbook says, and supportive of the True Church.

Regarding the personnel in charge of the meeting, an Active member of the Legion must be the moderator or chairperson. The lay speakers who give the opening talk need not be experts (experience has found it better that they *not* be!) nor even well-versed in the Faith, since the purpose of the talk is to provoke discussion, not to inform the listeners with an exhaustive treatment of the topic.

The other main position is that of a priest spiritual director, who need not be a Legion priest. In these unsettled days outside and within the Catholic Church, it is, sad to say, necessary to establish beforehand the orthodoxy of the priest called to represent the Church at Patricians meetings. This would apply also to

situations where a priest is not available and where, in certain circumstances a deacon or qualified layperson is concerned. The reason for this is the usual occurrence of unintentional heretical statements being made in the course of the open and free discussion, and left hanging until the spiritual director in his talk corrects them, thus fulfilling a main purpose of the meeting which is to teach and uphold the truths of the Catholic Church. It should be understood that in the event that no spiritual director can be present or obtained, no Patrician meetings should be held.

It is most important to have interesting and teachable topics such as *Why go to Mass?*, *What is Purgatory?*, *What Catholics Believe about Mary*, *Why Have a Pope?*, *What is Grace?*, *Why Confess to a Priest?*, etc. With only twelve meetings a year and all the truths of the Faith to be shared, it is necessary to make each of them count by using this kind of subject. Once the Patricians is held regularly and has run a few years, the Lives of the Saints and other devotional topics could be included in the schedule; but since the overall goal is to produce apostles, the apologetic themes must form a basis of the program.

The Legion has shown what it thinks of the Patricians by using thirteen pages of its official handbook to explain and describe it. Of all the procedures in the Legion system, the Patricians is the only one that is completely covered in every detail in the handbook, and one reason for this is that the Patricians is not just a work of the Legion but a loose form of membership. The Patrician prayer begins with the words: "Bless the Society of the Patricians into which we have entered;" an indication of something more official in the organization than a work project.

Though not a strict entity like a praesidium or a council, it is more than an assigned work, and more than a parish discussion group. It has a Legion identity and must be run according to rule as with every other Legion structure. The Legion altar is the visual center of the meeting where Our Lady presides, and the sense of order is present just as at the praesidium that runs the Patricians. If the Patricians is expected to be run by a praesidium as set out in the handbook, it follows that some occasional supervision by the higher council, perhaps in the form of visitation, is necessary to assure that the Patricians is what the Legion intends it to be.

Being a priest well experienced with the Patricians, I would recommend to every praesidium intending to start a Patricians that those thirteen pages of the handbook be read and studied thoroughly before beginning. Like the Legion itself, it will prosper beautifully if run according to rule.

The Patricians is one more way the Legion attempts to reach all the souls of a community, for it has seen it deepen the Faith in the lives of inactive or uninvolved Catholics, seen them trained to express those truths and receive the confidence and desire to share those truths with others. Some may become

Active or Auxiliary members, and some will go their own apostolic way, thanks to the Patricians and the Legion of Mary.