

Inside the Legion of Mary – Our Lady of the Legion

Perfection for Mary

By Father Francis J. Peffley

Frank Duff's early article on Perfection for Mary should be made known to all legionaries because it opens the door to real intimacy with her. Although the word *perfection* can be intimidating, legionaries by the very nature of the purpose of their organization – personal holiness – are *expected* to work for spiritual perfection. To be a perfect mountain climber does not mean the mountain must be climbed perfectly straight up, but negotiated diligently, with the motive to eventually reach the peak. Frank Duff writes, *I am not punning when I say that the motive for that quest of perfection must be our motives. If our motives are not in order and vivid to us, no sustained effort is possible.*

He goes on to point out that it is not sufficient that our motive be a vague one of love of God. There should be a notion of the different Divine Persons for example, or of the actual personhood of Our Lady.

Perfection for Mary can be understood by legionaries if it is remembered that they are all the time working in union with her, for her Son. Frank Duff says that if we are to enable her to fulfill her motherhood we must enter fully into it and work according to her method. This means the practice of having her at least indistinctly before our minds at all times, and sometimes even *distinctly* before our minds, while trying to do everything well, in the way we imagine her as doing it.

St. Louis de Montfort reminds legionaries that they are fighting under Mary's gaze; he uses the image of a queen in her tower watching how her soldiers are fighting for her in the battle below. Frank Duff tells us that Mary's gaze is a "microscopic" one, that our lives are lived under her unsleeping care with a degree of closeness far surpassing human motherhood, and to say this falls far short of the actual reality. Since Our Lady's acts and ours are to be simultaneous, each affecting the other, ours must not fall short. It would be like forcing Our Lady *into negligent performance!* as Frank Duff says. One consoling thing to keep in mind is that we are not expected to *show* perfection but are expected to *intend* it. So, even though we may not feel like an artist, we must try to approximate an artist's sense of perfection and must make each act, however simple, a perfect one, "*which will lend itself to Mary's fruitful motherhood, enabling her to lavish her 'magnificence' on us, that 'magnificence' which is the Holy Spirit who is with her and whom she gives.*"

The question is how can perfection be applied to the every day insignificant duties we go through in our state of life? They do not seem to hold the prospect for perfection! Frank Duff thinks otherwise. He claims it is possible to put into

each of our daily occupations as much, or even more care than Michelangelo put into his masterpieces! He insists the answer lies in our *motive* and the degree of care we take with each act “*which is being inspected by God*” who sees the heart.

What is needed is some sort of “technique” to be worked out, a conscious pattern to follow every day, moment by moment, as best we can. Our founder’s article offers three components for this spiritual project. The first is to “*aim consistently at good performance*,” just as a craftsman or artist who takes great pride in his work. We have often been told as children to “do the best you can.” As Our Blessed Mother’s children – giving her the opportunity to come alive in us in order to reach her other children – this “doing the best we can” for her can become a continuous proof of our love.

The second is “*add an extra something to the task as a conscious, deliberate expression of your desire for perfection*.” This can take on many forms of expression and may seem like a childish suggestion, but it is the secret to success. It may be a mere touch that takes a second to do, but, done with a specific connection to the intention of aiming at perfection, it becomes the means to real holiness.

What is considered to be that *extra something*? Here are Frank Duff’s samples:

“An additional rub or stitch or trimming or polishing; a tying up of loose ends; an oiling; a final tidying up; an embellishment; an act of courtesy. Or such as the following: After washing ourselves, there is the irresistible impulse to drop down towel and soap any way. But just as we should have cleaned ourselves properly, so should the whole action be rounded off into a completeness. Part of this would undoubtedly lie in placing the towel and soap evenly in their places. Childish? The artist would give his extra touches because he judged them to be necessary steps towards his goal of perfection. In your case they may not, humanly speaking, be necessary. To bestow that further rub upon the plate you are drying may not make it any drier. But it links your drying operations to the housekeeping of Mary and makes them part of the mechanism of Redemption.”

It is true that doing these extra things requires increased effort and could become tedious; doing things over and over does become monotonous and mentally burdensome. But increased effort turns on spiritual energy which makes the work lighter. It can enliven the routines of daily living and when applied to the spiritual life can transform routine into an invaluable habit of perfection!

The *consistent aim at good performance* and the *adding of that extra touch* leads us to the third component in the goal of perfection for Mary. He says that in

developing this habit of perfection it is necessary to crystallize it in a phrase or word which is repeated along with the "extra touch." He recommends the phrase "Perfection for Mary." He assures legionaries who take on this principle of perfection that *instead of an added burden, it carries the burden. It supplies a motive for interest and effort. It turns tedium into refreshment. It gives meaning to each link of that galling chain which binds us. It opens a window and lets in light so that the dullness shows up as full color. It puts wings on us so that we soar to celestial heights.*