

Inside the Legion of Mary – Our Lady of the Legion

The Legionary Promise

By Father Francis J. Peffley

The story is told of the early days of the Legion when the need for a commitment statement of membership came up at the Concilium meeting. It was decided to ask all the spiritual directors and Frank Duff to compose something for new members to recite upon entering the Legion. The following month, after some of the priests had read their contributions – all beginning with a reference to Our Lady – Frank Duff read his, beginning with the words “Most Holy Spirit.” It is said that, as they listened, the priests began tearing up their papers or stuffing them in their pockets, realizing they were hearing an original prayer and true theology for the Legion, which, though being dedicated to Mary, was to be a providential instrument of the Holy Spirit.

By using the seven letters of the word “promise” as a guide, we can gain much appreciation of the richness and beauty of the Legionary Promise.

P. In keeping with the original insight of Frank Duff, P stands for *Paraclete*, the Holy Spirit, to whom the Legion Promise is made. It is not addressed to the Lord Jesus or to the Blessed Mother but to the Sanctifier, since sanctity is the very purpose of the Legion – the sanctification of its members and those they encounter in their work – and its mission is Pentecostal. Its name is Legion of Mary, but because of Our Lady’s unique relationship to the Holy Spirit, it could also be called the Legion of the Holy Spirit. He is called upon at the beginning of every meeting; his symbol, the dove, dominates the Legion standard on every Legion altar and is found on every Legion prayer card and every handbook; and every altar cloth shows red, his color.

R is for the *Reign of Christ*. The Promise tells the members that they are to extend the reign of Christ and to bring Christ to the world. The Legion Promise can be likened to a personal Annunciation when the members ask the Holy Spirit to come upon them so that Christ can be born within them, so they can bring Christ to the world. Two thousand years ago the Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary; Christ was conceived within her and she brought Christ to Elizabeth in the Visitation and to the whole world as its Savior. The Legion Promise is like a new Annunciation: when the members read, “Behold the handmaid of the Lord,” the Holy Spirit comes upon them and together with Our Lady and the Holy Spirit they too are able to bring the reign of Christ to the world.

The next letter is O, standing for *obedience*; obedience to the Church and to our Holy Father, obedience to the Legion and to Our Lady. The lines in the promise – “*I so declare my entire dependence on her,*” – “*that I may be pure in her who was made immaculate by you,*” and “*I will submit fully to its discipline,*”

correspond to the three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience which the great Religious Orders have been built upon. Members do not take those vows in the Legion, but in a sense, the Promise indicates a rule of lay spirituality, a simple, special way of life, possible to all who belong. Members are exhorted to live out *the spirit of poverty*, which can be found in the practice of the True Devotion to Mary in which all is given over to her; *the spirit of chastity*, by living the fullness of the promise with integrity and in conscious union with Our Lady and the Holy Spirit; *the spirit of obedience*, in humble submission to the Legion system, and a sincere willingness to be formed by it, so as to realize that in obeying the discipline of the Legion, one is in reality obeying Our Lady.

M is for Our Lady's *Motherhood of Souls* and for her Mediation of Grace. Our Lady is the spiritual mother of every human being, and since the Legion's aim in its apostolate is to see and serve Jesus in others as Mary would, it actually participates in her motherhood of souls. In a sense, the Legion is something like a "mystical body for Mary," caring for the Mystical Body of her Son. Our Lady is living and working through the legionaries. So by being incorporated into Mary's motherhood of souls and her mediation of grace to others, the Legion becomes a channel of grace to others. Jesus, who is the source of all grace, has willed that all grace comes through Mary, just as he came to the world through her at the Incarnation.

Instrument is the word to go with I. Usually an instrument is thought of as an inanimate tool, like a pliers or a spoon. In the Legion Promise the member asks to become "*an instrument of your mighty purposes.*" Legionaries, though, are not intended to be inanimate, but just the opposite! They should be willing, zealous and loving instruments in the service of Our Lady. So a better example could be that of the hands of a violinist. It's true that the instrument is the violin, but the hands of the artist are what brings out the beauty of the song and the spirit of the artist, and can be said to be the instruments of the artist's soul. So legionaries can be said to be the living hands of Mary, whether weak or strong, but, willing, trusting, conscious instruments, alive with the Holy Spirit, reaching out with her to touch and heal the suffering Mystical Body.

The S stands for *soldier*: "*I stand before you as her soldier and her child.*" The Promise makes the legionaries both soldiers and children of a "Queen Mother" as in the Old Testament days. The new legionary becomes a soldier of a Queen, and a child of a Mother, referring to the sacraments of Confirmation and Baptism when one becomes a soldier of God in Confirmation and a child of God in Baptism. The demands of the Promise will be for the soldier the courageous sense of duty and steady devotion to Queen and cause, and for the child, a confident love and total trust in a Mother's ever-present care.

Lastly, E stands for *Eternity*. Some time ago, a little old lady was recruited into the Legion, completed her probation period and was an active member for about six months before she died. The president of her praesidium at the time was in

correspondence with Frank Duff and she told him of her recently deceased member. He wrote back and said, "Because of her legionary membership her whole eternity will be different." So if we live as a legionary and die as a legionary we will be legionary for all eternity. We will have a special degree of glory in heaven, a special radiance, a special happiness. So let us pray that all legionaries will continue to live the Legion life and die in the Legion, to be known forever as Our Blessed Mother's special legionary children and soldiers.