

Inside the Legion of Mary – Our Lady of the Legion

The Presence of Mary

By Father Francis J. Peffley

There is a section in the handbook that uses the phrase “a local presence of Mary” when alluding to the presence of a praesidium in a parish. This inconspicuous paragraph is one of the most important in the handbook because it goes to the heart of what the Legion of Mary is. Many years ago Frank Duff was asked for a one-line definition of the Legion. He replied, “*The Legion of Mary is Mary’s up-to-date garment of flesh.*” He then added, “*We are Mary all over again!*” In other words, legionaries are Mary “in the flesh,” her “mystical body”: the heart and mind, hands and feet of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the world today! What an amazing statement! What a privileged calling for legionaries! To be the much needed Mother of Christ still at work in this world of today! There are many organizations and societies in the Church which are dedicated to Our Lady, consecrated to her or named after her and promote devotion to her; the Legion is the only one that claims to *be* her.

In 1531, in Guadalupe, Mexico, Our Lady appeared in the form of a beautiful woman, leaving her saving, consoling message and the famed tilma with her image upon it, and then was gone. In 1854, in Lourdes, France, she appeared in the form of a beautiful woman, holding a rosary, leaving her message of prayer and penance, and then was gone. In 1917 she appeared in Fatima, Portugal, in the form of a beautiful woman holding the rosary, leaving her warnings and messages of prayer and penance, and then was gone. In 1921, in Dublin, Ireland, she appeared, many believe, in the form of the Legion of Mary, holding and praying the rosary, bringing the message of apostleship – and she never left! She came to stay, and, through Servant of God Frank Duff, formed her own “mystical body” to serve and mother the Mystical Body of her Son. So members of the Legion become a spiritual presence of the Blessed Mother on earth! (Legionaries should keep in mind this special calling when recruiting new members: they are offering them the opportunity to actually participate in the spiritual motherhood of Our Lady!)

Following this thought, one could say the Legion is a “continual apparition” of Mary as she intends herself to be seen in the Church and in the world. What an obligation legionaries have to make sure she appears as she intends! She has chosen the particular form of the Legion as it has developed with its spirit, system, mission, rules, counsels and specific identity. Are our praesidia true to this image by trying their best to be the genuine Legion of Mary, and not one that members or officers personally prefer? How correctly do legionaries allow her to appear as they are called on to show her obedience to the rules? How much of her anxiety for souls is found in the hearts of her “members?” How often are they

aware that in their Legion life and work they are intended to be an appearance of her to others?

When looking at the Legion on different levels, an individual legionary is called to be a *particular* presence of the Blessed Mother by personal words, actions and presence to families, coworkers, neighbors and the people met on Legion assignments. In the parish setting, the praesidium is the presence of Our Lady. Every parish has a father, whether it be pastor or associate. I like to call parishes without the Marian devotion *single-parent parishes* because they are without a mother – the Blessed Mother. Parishes without a Blue Army, Sodality, Rosary group, Marian novena or some regular Marian program I consider to be single-parent parishes. What happens in a home when the mother's not there? The father has his hands full: the kids could get the same Cheerios for breakfast and Spaghetios for lunch every day; homework not supervised, beds left unmade, clothes not washed, etc. The mother's touch and care are missing. All parish families have their own set of problems. The best thing Father can have in the parish is the Legion because it becomes a spiritual mother of the parish, concerned about the "children" the spiritual father is too busy to deal with: lax Catholics, lapsed Catholics; invalid marriages, the ill and neglected. Everything Our Lady did for Christ two thousand years ago, the Legion does for the Church today: Mary took care of Christ in his human body; the Legion helps her take care of his Mystical Body. The spiritual mother and father, living and working together, make for a happy, spiritually healthy parish family.

A curia is a *district* presence of Our Lady, a comitium a *diocesan* presence, a senatus, a *regional* presence, and with the Concilium in Ireland, the Legion becomes a *global* presence of Our Lady in the world. Pope John Paul II said Our Lady is found at her shrines. Lourdes, Fatima, Guadalupe all stir up faith and give a sense of her presence, of her actual existence. Many people make pilgrimages to these shrines and come away uplifted or inspired, enriched in their spiritual life. At every Legion meeting there is also a shrine, a shrine of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, attended by legionaries not on an occasional pilgrimage, but a weekly visit; they will come away not only inspired or uplifted, but spiritually energized as *living shrines* of Mary; they will display her gifts, extend the love she had for her Son in Galilee, and reproduce her motherhood for him in the needy world of today.