

# The Patrons of the Legion

## 7. St. John the Baptist

(From the Legion of Mary *Handbook*, pages 143-144)

It is a strange fact, not easily explained, that it was not until 18 December, 1949 that St. John the Baptist was formally placed among the patrons of the Legion. For he is more intimately bound up with the devotional scheme of the Legion than any of its patrons, with the exception of St. Joseph.

- (a) He was the type of all legionaries, that is a forerunner of the Lord, going before him to prepare his way and make straight his paths. He was a model of unshakable strength and devotion to his cause for which he was ready to die, and for which he did die.
- (b) Moreover, he was formed for his work by Our Blessed Lady herself, as all legionaries are supposed to be. St. Ambrose declares that the main purpose of Our Lady's considerable stay with Elizabeth was the forming and appointing of the little Great-Prophet. The moment of that formation is celebrated by the Catena, our central prayer, which is laid as a daily duty on every legionary.
- (c) That episode of the Visitation exhibits Our Lady in her capacity as Mediatrix for the first time, and St. John as the first beneficiary. Thereby was St. John exhibited from the first as a special patron of legionaries and of all legionary contacts, of the work of visitation in all its forms, and indeed of all legionary actions – these being but efforts to co-operate in Mary's mediatorial office.
- (d) He was one of the essential elements in the mission of our Lord. All those elements should find a place in any system which seeks to reproduce that mission. The precursor remains necessary. If he be not there to introduce Jesus and Mary, perhaps they may not come upon the scene at all. Legionaries must recognise this special place of St. John, and by their faith in him enable him to pursue his mission. "If Jesus is perpetually 'he who comes', likewise St. John is he who ever precedes him, for the economy of the historical Incarnation of Christ is continued in his Mystical Body." (Danielou)
- (e) The appropriate place for the invocation of St. John is in the Concluding Prayers next after the angels. Those prayers then picture the Legion in forward march, dominated by the Holy Spirit manifesting himself through Our Lady as a Pillar of Fire; supported by the Angelic Legion and its heads, St. Michael and St. Gabriel, preceded by its scout or precursor, St.

John, as ever fulfilling his providential mission; then its generals, Saints Peter and Paul.

- (f) St. John the Baptist has two liturgical celebrations. That of his nativity occurs on 24 June, and of his martyrdom on 29 August.

“I believe that the mystery of John is still being accomplished in the world of today. Whoever is to believe in Christ Jesus, the spirit and virtue of John must first come into his soul and prepare for the Lord a perfect people, make straight the paths in the rough places of his heart and smooth the ways. Up to this day the spirit and virtue of John go before the coming of the Lord and Saviour. (Origen)