

## **Frank Duff and the Eucharist February 2020**

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There is a well-established principle in theology that states that if God calls someone to a particular mission or task he also supplies all the means, both natural and supernatural, for fulfilling that task or mission. Frank Duff was called by God to be the prime mover, indeed the founder, of an extraordinary movement of the lay apostolate, the Legion of Mary. God in his providence shaped the inner and outer life of Frank Duff not only for his benefit but for the whole Legion and indeed the Universal Church. That is why I think a major focus of our celebration of the centenary of the Legion should be a deep reflection on the inner life of Frank Duff and his writings, especially the Handbook, which I have suggested often before is the autobiography of his soul. So in the coming months I would like to try and draw a portrait of the inner life of Frank Duff because I think this would help to inspire and encourage legionaries to live more joyfully the great treasure of the Legion vocation and indeed it would be a blessing on the Universal Church.

Today I would like to begin our portrait of the spirituality of Frank Duff with the theme: 'The Eucharist in the life of Frank Duff and the Legion.'

The Second Vatican Council said: 'the Eucharist is the source and summit of the whole Christian life.' Several years before the Council Frank Duff wrote in the Handbook with utter conviction: 'The Eucharist is the centre and source of grace: therefore it must be the very keystone of the Legion scheme. The most intense activity will accomplish nothing of value if it forgets for a moment that the main object is to establish the reign of the Eucharist in all hearts. For therefore is fulfilled the purpose for which Jesus came into the world. That purpose was to communicate himself to souls so that he might make them one with him. The means of that communication is chiefly in the Holy Eucharist. The Eucharist is the infinite good. For in that Sacrament is Jesus Himself.' There we have a clear statement that the Legion is called by God to be a lay apostolic movement radically rooted in the Eucharist.

The Eucharist is absolutely pivotal in the spirituality of Frank Duff. He always remembered with deep gratitude the Holy Ghost Father who instructed and prepared him for his First Communion. Years later he was asked at a public meeting if he believed that children could really understanding what they were doing at First Communion time and he replied with an emphatic yes based on his own experience and the teaching of St. Pius X.

Around the age of 24 he decided to go to daily Mass during Lent and continued to do so for the rest of his life. Indeed he often assisted at two Masses a day especially in his later years. And by a lovely touch of Divine Providence he was able to participate in two

Masses on the day he died.

Several years before the beginning of the Legion he started The League of Daily Mass. We have the book in which he inscribed the names of those who agreed to attend daily Mass. Of course it is a suggested apostolate for legionaries in the Handbook. In his booklet *Can We Be Saints*, which is a kind of first draft or outline of some of the most important passages of the Handbook he writes: 'Foremost in the consideration of our day - and on an eminence apart, like the Cross itself - must stand the daily Mass and the daily reception of the Holy Eucharist The person who is able easily to go to morning Mass, and does not do so, only deceives himself if he thinks he is aiming at great holiness.'

I was deeply impressed when Frank Duff said that the highlight of the Golden Jubilee celebrations of the Legion for him was the coming of the Blessed Sacrament into his home. There was an open air Mass and at the end the Ciboria with the consecrated hosts were kept in his house. He was immensely overjoyed at this privilege. Anyhow it seems very clear to me that God gave Frank Duff the gift of a very great devotion to the real presence of Our Lord in the Eucharist to enable him to found the Legion. This devotion manifested itself early in his life. As a young civil servant he spent his lunch breaks in the nearby convent of Marie Repatrice in Eucharistic Adoration and loved to go to Benediction on Sunday afternoons at the Convent of the Redemptoristines. However, it is in the chapter of the Handbook entitled the Eucharist and the Legionary that we have the expression of his most mature thought and conviction on the Eucharist, where he opens the deepest insights of his heart for every generation of legionaries. Manifestly, Frank Duff was a man of the Eucharist. Everyday his life was centred on the Eucharist.

Before closing these very brief reflections on Frank Duff and the Eucharist let me refer to the emphasis he gives to Our Lady and the Eucharist. In the words of the Handbook he writes: 'Let those who aim to be associated to Mary in her maternal care of souls, share her maternal anguish, and strive, in union with her, to allay that hunger of the Body of Christ. Every avenue of legionary action must be availed of to awaken knowledge and love of the Blessed Sacrament and to dissipate the sin and indifference that keep men from it. Each Holy Communion brought about is truly an immeasurable gain. Through the individual soul, it nourishes the entire Mystical Body of Christ, and causes it to advance in wisdom and grace with God and men. (Lk 2:52)'

May Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament help all legionaries throughout the world to a deeper love of the real presence of Our Lord in the Eucharist. Amen