

March 2015
CONCILIUM ALLOCUTIO BY REV. FR. BEDE MCGREGOR, OP
SPIRITUAL DIRECTOR TO THE CONCILIUM

THE GIFT OF HUMILITY

In chapter 30 of the Handbook on the Functions of the Legion, the first function listed is the annual Acies. We read,

“Bearing in mind the importance of the devotion to Mary in the Legion system, each year there shall be a consecration of legionaries to Our Lady. The consecration – which shall comprise both an individual and a collective consecration – will take place on 25th March, or a day close thereto, and it shall be known as the Acies.”

So, it seems to me a good time to review and renew our relationship to Mary and to consider some aspect of what it means to be consecrated to her because it would not be possible to treat all aspects of what it means for a legionary to be truly consecrated to Mary in one relatively brief allocution.

It has often been noted that Chapter 3 on the Spirit of the Legion of Mary is the shortest one in the whole Handbook. But, its opening line sums up magnificently and simply the whole spirit of the Legion spirituality. We all know it well,

“The spirit of the Legion of Mary is the spirit of Mary herself.” Then follows the line,
“Especially does the Legion aspire after her profound humility.”

Let us consider humility as one of the essential elements of every type of consecration to Mary.

Let us start with a Pauline description of the nature of humility.

“What have you that you did not receive? If then you received it, why then do you boast as if it were not a gift?” (Cor. 4:7).

Everything that we are and that we possess is sheer gift. We do not make ourselves to exist; we are loved into existence by God and continue to exist by His creative providence. St. Catherine of Siena put it this way:

“God is He Who Is, I am she who is not.”

Of course, no one had more insight into this primordial truth than Mary who fully understood the infinite gap between the absolute being of God and the absolute nothingness of her creaturely being. It is clear that Mary never for a moment forgets that everything that she is and possesses is sheer gift of God and so her prayer life is essentially one of thanksgiving and praise for the merciful and infinite generosity of God. Thus she sings,

“My soul glorifies the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour; He looks on His servant in her lowliness, henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.”

Humility is recognising the absolute origin of all that is good and grace filled in us and giving the thanks and praise where it is due. It does not attract attention to itself as the source of any apostolic success or holiness. No wonder the Magnificat of Mary is the great prayer that binds all legionaries, active and auxiliary together in mind and heart. The Magnificat is the great antidote to all forms of pride, especially the more subtle types that could destroy the spirit of the Legion.

May I recommend as part of our Lenten spiritual reading the whole section 2 of chapter 6: *'The imitation of Mary's humility is both the root and the instrument of legionary action.'* I cannot cover or even summarise all its tremendous teaching but will give you one quotation that tells us a great deal about Legion spirituality,

"She was humble because she was likewise aware that she was more perfectly redeemed than any of the children of men. She owed every gleam of her inconceivable sanctity to the merits of her Son, and that thought was ever vivid in her mind. Her peerless intellect was full of the realization that as she had received more, so no other creature stood as much in God's debt as she. Hence her attitude of exquisite and graceful humility was effortless and constant.

Studying her, therefore, the legionary will learn that the essence of true humility is the recognition and unaffected acknowledgment of what one really is before God; the understanding that one's worthlessness alone is one's own. Everything else is God's free gift to the soul: his to increase, diminish, or withdraw completely, just as he alone gave it."

Of course no one has ever been a more intimate witness of the infinite humility of God than Mary. She experienced the sublime courtesy of God during the momentous conversation of the Annunciation that changed the whole history of mankind. She daily witnessed how God gave Himself to her maternal guidance during the long years of the hidden life at Nazareth. She could never forget the staggering image of God washing the feet of His disciples; God the Creator at the feet of His own creatures in humble service. Finally, there is the incredible humility of God on Calvary. These experiences of Mary steeped her soul in humility. When Our Lord said,

"Learn from Me for I am gentle and humble of heart."

No one has learned more than Our Lady and this is what she teaches in her turn to the Legion. So the Handbook states,

"Especially, does the Legion aspire after her profound humility."

So there is an immense Gospel wisdom behind the simple Legion assertions,

"without humility there can be no holiness," and "without humility there can be no effective legionary action."

We approach every person in the spirit of Mary and that means with the utmost respect and humility. Any kind of superiority complex is utterly foreign to everything the Legion stands for. So, if strains (tensions) should ever arise as they must surely do at times even in the best praesidium, the first step towards a resolution of the difficulties must be a review and renewal of our consecration to Mary and especially to her humility.

Let me give the last words to St. Francis de Sales, one of the gentlest of all saints who writes:

"True humility makes no pretence of being humble, and scarcely ever utters words of humility."

Amen.