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*The Recruitment of New Members:
An Invitation to a Many Splendid Grace*

There is a simple sentence in the Handbook that requires a great deal of reflection. It reads: 'Part of the duty of every legionary shall be the winning of members.' Elsewhere the Handbook says the same thing but with an additional exhortation: 'Therefore these important subjects of extension and recruiting should frequently be brought to the notice of the members so that each one be made acutely conscious of his duties in those directions.' But why recruit? Unless we have clear and convincing reasons for acting we would probably end up doing very little or nothing at all. Motivation is pivotal for any form of action, but especially apostolic action. We recruit not simply so that we can boast of an increase in the number of members, but because we firmly believe the Legion is a source of great graces, not only for the legionary himself but for all those he works for. Recruitment is simply offering an invitation to receive an endless source of graces and an instrument for a fuller living of the Christian life.

Let us examine some of the reasons for recruitment given in various parts of the Handbook. First there is the motive of fraternal charity. To love someone is to effectively will good for that person and we cannot offer anything greater than grace. The Handbook puts it this way: 'We are commanded to love our neighbour as ourselves; hence if the Legion is a blessing to oneself, shall not one seek to bring that blessing to others? If one sees souls uplifted by ones work, should one not aspire to extend that work?

A beautiful reason for recruiting concerns Our Lady. The Legion enables one and gradually forms one to having a true and authentic devotion to Mary. This is truly a tremendous gift to offer another person. The Handbook puts it succinctly: 'Can any legionary not strive to gather in new members, if he reflects that the Legion cannot but advance them in the love and service of Mary? This, after Jesus Himself, is the greatest blessing which can enter a life. For God has made her - in dependence on Christ and inseparably from Him - the root and the growth and the flowering of the supernatural life.' I think that recruitment can be a true indicator of what we really think about Mary and the place she has in God's plan for ourselves and every one we are called to meet and serve.

I cannot within the compass of a short Allocutio give all the reasons suggested in the Handbook for the grace filled apostolate of recruiting, but let me give one more reason that I think has special significance in the Church today. It is found in a long quotation from Mgr. Alfred O'Rahilly. His opening sentence expresses one of the most important and urgent tasks of the Church in the light of the Second Vatican Council: 'The great function of the Legion of Mary is to develop the sense of a lay vocation.' There has been praiseworthy progress in the understanding and implementation of the mission of the laity in the Church and the world in the last 50 years since the Council. The

flourishing of so many new ecclesiastical movements and the setting up of the Political Council of the Laity are a praiseworthy step forward. However, can we say the specific vocation of the laity as taught in the Conciliar and post-Conciliar documents has really been appropriated by the whole Church, especially outside the religious movements? I think the Legion inculcates a profound and authentic sense of the lay vocation especially at parish and diocesan level. This is a compelling reason why recruitment to the Legion is such an urgent and indispensable apostolate. It gives the lay person a true and experienced sense of his dignity and role in God's plan for the mission of the Church.

Let me quote extensively from the Handbook for the sake of those readers of the *Allocutio* who may not be legionaries: 'We forget that Our Lord calls his own sheep by name (John 10:3); that in the words of Saint Paul (Gal 2:20), who, like us, was physically present on Calvary – 'the Son of God loved me and gave Himself up for me.' Each of us, even if he be only a village carpenter as was Jesus himself, or a humble housekeeper like his mother, has a vocation, is called individually by God to give him his or her love and service, to do a particular work which others may indeed surpass but cannot replace. No one but myself can give my heart to God or do my work. It is precisely this personal sense of religion which the Legion fosters. A man is no longer content to be passive or perfunctory; she or he has something to be done for God; religion is no longer a side issue; it becomes the inspiration of one's life, however humanly commonplace. And this conviction of personal vocation inevitably creates an apostolic spirit, the desire to carry on Christ's work, to be another Christ to serve Him in the least of his brethren. Thus the Legion is the lay substitute for the Religious Order, the translation of the Christian idea of perfection into the lives of the folk, the extension of Christ's kingdom into the social world of today.'

Those words of Mgr. O'Rahilly as quoted in the Handbook are worth pondering again and again because they represent a truly profound insight into the nature and vocation of the Legion. But let me finish by saying we must feel the need to recruit new members and extend the Legion as an act of thanksgiving for our own membership.

The apostolate of recruiting is a true indicator of my appreciation of what Jesus and the Holy Mary have done for me through the instrumentality of the Legion. Amen.