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Concilium Allocutio By Fr. Bede McGregor O.P.
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Suffering and the New Evangelisation

Suffering is a part of every human life and Christians are not exempt from it and certainly not legionaries. Sometimes we are tempted to think that Christians are called to suffer more than others when we think of how they have to suffer persecution and discrimination and opposition in nearly every place at some time sooner or later. There are so many different kinds of martyrdom that Christians are called to suffer. So it is common sense or practical realism that we try to get some understanding of the place of suffering in God's plan for each one of us. Fortunately, there are some extraordinarily profound insights in the Handbook on the meaning and place of suffering in our lives.

First of all we need to remember that suffering played an immense part in the life of Christ from the beginning to the end of His life. He accepted suffering, sometimes with difficulty, and offered it up in astonishing love for the redemption of the world. Just making the Stations of the Cross or praying the Sorrowful mysteries of the Rosary will give us some idea of the horrific sufferings of Jesus. Suffering also plays a major part in the life of Mary the Mother of God. As the Handbook puts it: 'At the foot of the Cross stands a figure, so desolate that it seems impossible for her to continue to live. That woman is the mother alike of the Redeemer and of the redeemed.' So the central meaning of suffering for Christians and therefore for us legionaries is that suffering is **redemptive**. It is through the Cross that Jesus redeems the world and through her compassion that Mary co-redeems the world. What the Handbook calls the apostolate of suffering is a most efficacious means of evangelisation.

In recent years I have spoken a great deal to various groups of legionaries and other ecclesial movements about the necessity and urgency of the New Evangelisation. We really need to discover and experiment with new methods of evangelisation to meet the new situations of our modern world and the new emerging cultures. Of course, the content must be the same because it would be extremely rash and profoundly harmful if we tampered with God's revelation of Himself in Christ and His plan for the salvation of the world. We are not called to invent another Gospel or to pick and choose only what we think the new generations might accept. Also, I think it would be a great mistake for us to neglect those traditional means of evangelization that are an intrinsic part of the proclamation of the Gospel. ***Suffering is one of those indispensable means for the salvation of the world.***

I remember the famous saying of Archbishop Fulton Sheen, who recently was declared Venerable by Pope Benedict and who was a great friend and supporter of the Legion. He said that, "there was so much wasted suffering in the world today and nothing is worse than wasted suffering." "It is imperative that there be no wasted suffering in the Legion." The Handbook tells us for as Holy Scripture teaches us in every page God "has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ but of suffering for Him as well." (2Tim 2:11-12) In other words the Legion espouses the language of Scripture by calling suffering a privilege.

The Handbook also refers, in unison with so many saints and spiritual writers down the centuries, to suffering as a grace. We read, "It follows therefore that suffering is always a grace. When it is not to bestow healing, it is to confer power. It is never merely a punishment for sin."

"Understand" says St. Augustine, "that the affliction of mankind is no penal law, for suffering is medicinal in its character. And on the other hand, the passion of our Lord overflows, as an inestimable privilege, into the bodies of the sinless and the saintly in order to conform them ever more perfectly to his own likeness. This interchange and blending of sufferings is the basis of all mortification and reparation."

A legionary does not try only to acquire a truly Christian perspective on the suffering that will inevitably be part of his own life, he will also try to share this perspective with all those he meets in the course of his apostolate who suffer in so many different ways. Legionaries will come across many patients who seem to have very little quality of life either because of a severe accident, terminal illness, or simply because of the natural breakdown of the body from old age. They can feel absolutely useless to themselves and to anyone else. But to Christian faith this can be the most fruitful time in the life of the person. It can be the most effective form of evangelization because it can be profoundly redemptive for souls.

God has a sublime purpose for permitting suffering in our lives and it is to conform us to Christ and His redemptive mission. It is important for us legionaries to help restore the dignity of the human person who is gravely suffering by gently and in a genuine spirit of friendship and love to point out the tremendous possibilities for the eternal good of souls that God is inviting them to bring about. No person is ever useless to God at any time or in any circumstances. The New Evangelisation needs the huge potential of the reservoir of human suffering for the salvation of souls.

The Handbook gives us a useful summary of what I have been trying to say when it says, "This new view of life opened up to them, the patients, some of whom had touched the depths of misery in the thought of being so useless and a burden, will taste the supreme joy of feeling that they are of use to God."

Amen.