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CONCILIUM ALLOCUTIO BY REV. FR. BEDE MCGREGOR, OP
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The Weekly Meeting of the Praesidium

Our spiritual reading for today was on the weekly meeting of the praesidium. There are some powerful sentences in this section written by Brother Duff with utter conviction based on long reflection and deep experience. He writes: "This weekly meeting is the heart of the Legion from which the life blood flows into all its veins and arteries. It is the powerhouse from which its light and energy are derived.... The legionaries shall therefore regard attendance at their weekly praesidium meeting as their first and most sacred duty to the Legion. Nothing can supply for this; without it their work will be like a body without a soul." Elsewhere in the Handbook he writes without the slightest hesitation: 'It is the meeting which makes the Legion'. Let us ask the question: why is the weekly meeting of the praesidium the central focus point of the Legion? Why this request for wholehearted fidelity to attendance at the weekly meeting of the praesidium?

Let us go first to Sacred Scripture for an answer. According to Matthew, Mark and Luke the last words of Jesus before he ascended into heaven were a great commission to evangelise the whole world: 'Go into the whole world and preach the Gospel to every creature'. He says to us clearly and directly that he wants us to bear witness to the Gospel in word and deed. But what is the first thing the apostles do after receiving this commission? They go into the upper room, the cenacle, and gather around Mary and pray together with her. And what do they talk about during those ten days before the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost? First of all they must have spoken at great length about Jesus and all that they knew about him and what he meant to them. And nobody knows Jesus more intimately than Mary and just a little earlier she was given to each of them and the young community as their Mother. They could not but turn to her. Secondly, they must have discussed endlessly about the Holy Spirit whom Jesus had promised to give them. And no human person knows the Holy Spirit more intimately than Mary. Every moment of her life was lived under the inspiration of the Spirit and in total and joyful openness to Him. Her profound memory of all the events of our redemption would be an indispensable part of the treasury of the Church, the Body of Christ. Thirdly, they must have reflected on how they could implement the sacred command of the Risen Lord to preach the Gospel to the whole world. And Mary was at the heart of all their deliberations.

What has all this to do with the weekly meeting of the praesidium? Well, the praesidium meeting is our weekly cenacle experience. We have heard the call of Jesus received at Baptism that we must share the Good News of God's love for us and our redemption in our own localities and throughout the world. The first step to take is to gather around Mary our Mother just as the apostles did and we pray that the Holy Spirit will come among us to guide and lead us. The Legion Altar is the simple but profound reminder to us of the presence of Mary and the supernatural spirit of our meeting. Then we pray the Rosary and so contemplate Jesus through the eyes of Mary and in union with her heart meditate on all the great mysteries of His life. She shares her most precious memories with us. And we pray the Rosary together with all the courtesy and dignity her presence among us suggests. A true praying of the Rosary will transform us and our meeting. Each prayer of the Tesserà has a healing and formative value. It is in the context of a prayerful and truly fraternal spirit that we plan our

apostolic activity or work of evangelisation. Without the substantial weekly work given to us by the praesidium we would be just talkers and dreamers. But our weekly meeting with a weekly work undertaken and evaluated together is the source of immense grace for us and those we serve. It is the cenacle experience of our meeting and our actual apostolic work that are the secret of the Legion just as it was with the apostles at the beginning of the Church.

Legionaries who regularly miss their weekly meeting and fail to do a substantial weekly apostolic work will gradually drift away from the Legion as the Handbook predicts and lose the great gift of sharing in the joy of the maternal care of Mary for the mystical Body of Christ. And if legionaries in leadership roles neglect these two pillars of the Legion spirituality they will not only deprive themselves of many graces but they will also weaken and possibly destroy the work of Mary in the praesidium or higher councils. The praesidium is a precious cell of the mystical Body of Christ and the weekly meeting and the weekly work with Mary and in Her will ensure that it is a healthy, effective and really happy cell. To summarise again: the single most important element in active membership of the Legion is the weekly praesidium meeting and the carrying out of the two hour work assignment. It is certain that grace will abound in the Legion and through her to others when these two things are faithfully observed. Amen.