How the Legion of Mary Taught Me to be Catholic

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One of the first things I did after becoming Catholic, in my late 20's, was to join a lay apostolate called The Legion of Mary. It happened quite by chance. But it was probably part of God's plan. I happened to go to a Mass where Legion members were promoting the organization at an information table. The Legion sounded exactly like what I was looking for.

The Legion is an opportunity for fellowship with other committed Catholics. But prayer and spiritual study, and practicing works of mercy are key attributes of the organization. Joining the Legion proved to be a life-changing decision.

Through my involvement with the Legion I've learned what it means to live the Catholic faith. I learned this by the examples of much more seasoned members and through the experience of ministering to the poor in spirit.

In short, the Legion of Mary taught me how to be Catholic. It has taught me how to be fully alive in my faith. And most importantly, it has taught me that all Catholics are called to fully participate in the faith.

How it Works

Active members of the Legion of Mary participate in weekly meetings. The meetings include prayer and spiritual discussion, as well as an opportunity to perform an assigned work of mercy with another member. All work is performed in pairs, just as Jesus sent the apostles out in pairs.

The works of mercy include a variety of activities. They include things like praying the rosary at a local nursing home or performing prison ministry. Legion members also sponsor RCIA or teach CCD. Works can also include performing door-to-door visits to invite those within the parish bounds back to Mass, and visiting home-bound parishioners.

A Few Lessons

In my own experience of praying and learning alongside fellows members, and in the weekly work, which for a year included prison ministry, I began to notice and understand new things.

The Legion was showing me that God uses – and requires – everybody for His work. Members of the Legion are not particularly trained in evangelization. Instead, the spirit of the Legion is that of willingness and trust in the Holy Spirit and the Blessed Mother. One is called, and one answers. God will use whatever gifts you have, even if they are very small.

I learned, too, that the spiritual life is very often about planting seeds, as opposed to reaping a harvest. One may visit a fallen-away Catholic at their doorstep and never see them at Mass. Then perhaps they return to church years later.

Both of these things led to a humbling realization: the fruit of this work is not about me. I am only the instrument. It is a reminder that all that we have – especially our gifts and talents – are from God. I cannot take credit for a conversion. All I can do is simply thank God that I was able to serve as a conduit of His grace.

We are Made for Sainthood

The greatest gift was in realizing that the life and virtues modeled by the Legion of Mary are what are asked of all Catholics. We are called to pray, to be with others in fellowship, and most importantly, to serve Jesus in the person of others. Truly, it is a recipe for making saints.

The Legion's founder, Frank Duff, wrote a small book called, "Can We Be Saints?" In it, he states very simply, "Every person that is born is called to be a Saint." I believe this is what he had in mind in creating the Legion.

This is an ennobling thought: that God will truly use us, as we are, for His divine purposes, and that cooperating with His grace, He will call great things from us.

The Hidden Nature of the Legion

The Legion of Mary will reach its 100th birthday next year, and still many Catholics have not heard of it. When Bishop Barron released his *Letter to a Suffering Church* last year, he ended the book with a call to the laity to strengthen the Church through apostolates like L'Arche and Cursillo. The Legion of Mary, however, was not named.

Our Legion group speculated about why the Legion was not mentioned by Bishop Barron. We decided that it is because the Legion has always been something hidden in the life of the Church. The weekly meeting is ordinary, and so are its members. Frank Duff was simply an unmarried layperson, with a career as a civil servant in the Irish government.

And this is, after all, the nature of the organization. We go to the home-bound, hidden from society. We pray with the imprisoned, equally out of sight of society. This does not detract from its beauty though. The Legion may be hidden, but so were the first decades of Jesus's life. So too, the Holy Family was not marked by wealth or prestige. St. Therese was also small in her convent. And St. John the Baptist said, "He must increase, I must decrease."

I pray the Legion of Mary will see another 100 years, performing the hidden and heroic work of the Church in all corners of the world, building up a new generation of saints. I pray also that you, and many others, may see yourself in that work.

Servant of God Frank Duff, pray for us.