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*A Reflection on Leadership in the Legion of Mary*

Today we have elected a new President of Concilium Tommy McCabe so I ask you to pray for him and support him in every possible way you can. I think we should also thank Sile Ni Chochláin our outgoing President for the excellent leadership she has given us for the last six years. She did a phenomenal amount of work for the Legion and was a source of gentle inspiration to all of us. She was always of immense support to me and I value her friendship. I also would like to thank Liam Hayden and Enda Dunleavy for allowing their names to go forward as candidates. This should be a great example to all legionaries who are approached to accept some officership in the Legion. May Mary the Queen and Mother of the Legion give our new President Tommy and Sile our outgoing President her very special blessing and support.

So today I thought it would be a good idea to reflect for a while on leadership in the Legion worldwide and at every level. The good that true leadership will do in the Legion is immense and unfortunately the harm that bad leadership will do is beyond calculation.

As any good legionary will tell you, especially those who have held some officership at any level, when God invites you to undertake a task he also gives you the grace to carry it out. It is called the grace of office and I assure you it is very real. And that special grace comes to the officer like all graces through the maternal heart of Mary. An officer has a special claim on the friendship and maternal guidance of Mary and the supreme gift of the Holy Spirit. An officership in the Legion is an invitation to greater depth in holiness and apostolic zeal. It is a privileged time in the life of a legionary.

Now at the end of the section of the Handbook dealing with the role of the President of a praesidium there is a quotation from St. Therese of Lisieux, which I think makes some deep points on the responsibility of every legionary concerning the care of souls entrusted to him or her.

St. Therese writes as follows: "From the moment I was given the charge of souls, I saw at a glance that the task was beyond my strength, and quickly taking refuge in our Lord's arms, I imitated those babes who when frightened hide their faces on their father's shoulder: 'You see, Lord,' I cried, 'that I am too small to feed your little ones, but if through me you will give to each what is suitable, then fill my hands; and without quitting the shelter of your arms, or even turning my head, I will distribute your treasures to the souls who come to me asking for food. When they find it to their liking, I shall know that it is not to me they owe it, but to you; while if on the contrary they complain, finding fault with its bitterness, I shall not be at all disturbed, but shall try to persuade them it comes from you, and I will take care to give them none other' " (St. Therese of Lisieux).

The salvation of souls is beyond the strength and capability not only of St. Therese but of every legionary. It is God who saves souls but he uses us as instruments in one of the greatest of all tasks of the Christian. The secret of the apostolate is to stay very close to God and let Him work through us. We need to always pray that we do not become an obstacle to what God wants to do in and through us. It is a simple point but a pivotal one: every genuine apostolate is primarily God's work and our part is to co-operate with Him. Pride can creep so stealthily in and destroy our apostolic work because we tend to take the credit for whatever good is done. Humility is one of the great characteristics of Mary. Her whole soul and all her being give the glory to God and not to herself. Of course when we seek God's glory and not our own it takes the strain out of apostolic responsibility and leadership because we know that the work is God's and He will supply all we need to do it with Him.

St. Thomas Aquinas, and indeed all the great theologian saints link the virtue of humility with the theological virtue of Hope. The reason for this is easy to see. By humility we become habitually aware that everything we have to do depends primarily on the grace of God and especially our work for the salvation of souls. Hope arises immediately we actually begin to rely primarily on God and not on ourselves. Nothing is impossible to God. There is no such thing as a hopeless case when we rely on God and his holy Mother. These simple truths of the spiritual life are important for every legionary but most especially for all officers at all levels in the Legion. To seek power, prestige, or self importance is to be lacking in humility and hope and therefore to be unworthy of leadership or trust in the Legion Family. We look to the humility of Mary as the paradigm for leadership in apostolic work in all its forms. Leadership in the Legion means the opportunity of joyful and humble service of our fellow legionaries, empowering the little people to be saints and apostles and supporting and guiding the strong and enterprising. It means a special sharing in Mary's maternal care of the mystical Body of Christ.

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