

Allocutio Toronto Senatus January 15, 2023,
On Legionary Zeal In Our Present Circumstances

Reverend Joseph Moncada

The attainment of the marvellous and lofty objects and goals of our beloved Legion of Mary depends upon the zeal of its members, yours and mine. How often we have read in chapter 2 of the Legion handbook, "The object of the Legion Of Mary is the glory of God through the holiness of its members, developed by prayer and active cooperation, under the ecclesiastical, guidance, in Mary's and the Church's work of crushing the head of the serpent and advancing the reign of Christ." (Handbook, p. 11) Legionaries may possess every virtue but if the virtue of zeal is weak and declining, our Legion enterprise will immobilize and atrophy. Strong zeal makes for a strong Legion.

We can define zeal as great energy or enthusiasm in pursuit of a cause or an object. In the Christian tradition, zeal has been understood as the effect of charity for God and neighbour. It is love that drives our zeal; a zeal full of ardour, determination, eagerness, and passion for the glory of God, the extension of His kingdom, the salvation of souls, and the sanctification of our souls through dedication to the Legion apostolate. Our zeal should be modelled upon Our Lord Jesus Christ's zeal for his Father's glory and the salvation of souls achieved by the eager embrace of his passion. When the time was approaching for Our Lord to be taken up to heaven, with great determination he set his face to go Jerusalem to undergo his passion to put things right for mankind with God. Likewise, with a laser focused zeal, we should burn in the service of Our Lord and Our Lady to redress some of the decline and discouragement that has crept into our apostolate. If we ignore it, deny it, or fail to remedy it, we do so at our own peril! Let us work to make things right!

When I reflect on the effect of the COVID-19 lockdowns upon the zeal of our legionaries, I am led to some observations. In Canada, for the better part of two years, it was nearly impossible to work our Legion apostolate, yet many legionaries dutifully kept their desire to return to active works alive by volunteering to do non-legionary work in their parishes, by staying faithful to their Legion prayers, and by participating in online meetings and workshops. This wonderful and mutual encouragement was inspiring and encouraging for us to see. Nevertheless, when the parishes began to allow Legion meetings and the resumption of active works, one suspects there was--and remains--a portion of legionaries whose zeal for works diminished, and in some cases even died. While none of us can internally inspect the zeal of another, we can nonetheless observe the presence of zeal in external actions. We know a tree by its fruits. If we factor in a drop in active members due to retirement for reasons of illness, the infirmities of old age, and death, we still need to account for an unusual drop in active membership.

We have observed that a significant portion of Catholics has not returned to the practice of attending Sunday Mass post-lockdown, likewise, some legionaries have not returned to the active apostolate. Surely the cause of both is the same or at least very similar. To be cut off from the reception of the Holy Eucharist because of the lockdown was not within the control of the laity, but to intentionally keep away from Mass along with the reception of the Holy Eucharist, the Sacrament of love, for an extended period of time, even after the lockdown restrictions on our churches were relaxed, eventually weakens one's indwelling charity and in turn, leads to the diminishment of zeal. Just as muscles can atrophy through non-use, the ardour of zeal can cool through non-use.

The whole COVID-19 lockdown experience was for many Catholics incredibly discouraging. Some were disheartened to the point of religious indifference, some became apathetic toward their religious duties, and others were afflicted with acedia. The effects can be seen every Sunday with fewer people in the pews and fewer cars in the churches' parking lots. Similarly, being cut off from active works regrettably, and perhaps understandably, affected the zeal of some of our members. It appears that some lost their legionary zeal altogether. What else can we conclude? This should cause our legionary hearts serious concern for both Catholics who, though able, have not returned to Holy Mass and legionaries who for an apparent lack of zeal have taken "early retirement" from the active apostolate. We must go in search of these sheep!

The remedy for keeping the flames of zeal alive in our legionary hearts is ardent prayer for an increase in this virtue, a re-reading and re-commitment to our Legionary Promise, a re-reading of inspiring sections of the Legion Handbook, and a renewed desire to live out our Consecration to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Even beyond our daily Tessera, we should keep our praesidium members in our daily prayers. I remind you again, we should keep in touch with each other for mutual encouragement, especially whenever there is a need to strengthen a member who is wavering in his commitment. To further re-energize our zeal, let us continually pray to the Lord for an increase in divine charity toward God, souls and our Legion brothers and sisters, which in turn animates and drives that very zeal.