

### **The Secret Bag Collection**

The Legion of Mary collects funds from its members to meet the various expenses incurred by the operation of its apostolate. While the Legion's objectives are of the highest spiritual order, the praesidia and the higher councils nevertheless need monetary resources. As our human body has material needs that have to be met for the sake of the well-being of our soul, so our Legion needs to meet material requirements to support its goal of advancing the reign of Christ.

The contribution and acquisition of funds through the secret bag collection is in principle and practice secret. It is secretive in so far as no one knows whether or not the other members have contributed to it or the amount they have contributed. There is wisdom in this secrecy. By it, no member can be judged as being more generous or less generous than others. By it, a generous offering will not be seen as better than a smaller offering or no offering at all; and so, those with greater resources are in no way publicly elevated or esteemed more than those with fewer or no resources, and those with fewer resources or no resources can never be publicly chided or demeaned or feel humiliated. All this serves to remove any temptation to inwardly envy those who give more or inwardly disdain those who give less or nothing at all. The secrecy of the collection wisely places all givers on the same level.

The question may come to mind, how much should a member contribute to the secret bag? The Handbook does not specify an amount. With financial and economic realities ever in flux, it would be impossible to do so. The better question would be, how is one to give? Does the Handbook put forth a principle for the secret bag collection? Yes. "The obligation to subscribe is not complied with by the giving of a sum so inconsiderable, as to mean nothing to him." (Handbook p. 116) So, if one gives below his means then he is not giving according to a spirit of generosity. Every member no matter whether he has greater or lesser means knows what it means to be stingy. If you can donate only a small amount or nothing at all, do not be discouraged. Remember the poor widow's pence. In the gospel, the widow, who put two copper coins which make a penny into the treasury gave, our Lord says, more than everyone else, because they "all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty, put in everything that she had, her whole living." (Mk 12:42-43) Of themselves, the two coins were a meagre and trivial amount but in our Lord's eyes, they amounted to a "king's ransom" because they came from a generous heart, from all she had.

St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians gives us a clear idea of how we should give. He says that he thought it was necessary to exhort the brothers ahead of time to prepare a generous gift beforehand, so that it may be ready as a matter of generosity, and not as a

grudging obligation. (see 2 Corinthians 9:5) We too should give generously to the secret bag collection and not out of a sense of coercive obligation.

In the same letter, St. Paul sets down a spiritual principle that touches upon material giving. He teaches, "He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully." It follows that there should be an element of sacrifice in our giving; each member according to his means. Be assured that God will spiritually reward our material generosity. In the funding of our apostolate, even our secret bag collection acts as an instrument of personal sanctification. Ultimately, it glorifies God. Again, I emphasize, that each member should sacrificially give according to his means.

St. Paul offers the Corinthians another counsel equally applicable to us as we materially support the Legion: "Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly, or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." (2 Cor. 9:7.) And so, discern whether you give to the secret bag grudgingly or willingly. You will find either a clear conscience or the opportunity to correct it.

It is understood that contributing to the secret bag collection is a responsibility. Equally appreciate it as a great privilege to share in the wider mission of the Legion. Had the Legion system been established without a secret bag collection, I think we would earnestly beg permission to donate funds. There is a New Testament example of this sort of generosity. St. Paul writing to the Corinthians about the churches in Macedonia says "...they gave according to their means, as I can, testify, and beyond their means, of their own free will, begging us, earnestly for the favour of taking part in the relief of the saints. (2 Cor. 8:3-4) We should admire how they, with a touch of holy nagging, begged St. Paul for permission to donate to the other Christian churches, so eager were they for the building up of the kingdom of God. Likewise, and no less so, our secret bag contribution demonstrates our eagerness to work for the extension of the kingdom of God on earth.

Our collection may remain secret but our love for the Legion of Mary and her works has been revealed to all the world.

"Give and it shall be given unto you." (Lk. 6:38)

Dear legionaries be generous!