

# Mary's Legion Hears Bishop Casey 'No Other Group Your Equal'

Following is the text of Auxiliary Bishop Lawrence B. Casey's address at the annual "aces" or rededication ceremony for members of the Legion of Mary, the ceremony was held Sunday afternoon, March 24 at Sacred Heart Cathedral.

We are happy to welcome the active and auxiliary members of the Rochester Committee of the Legion of Mary as you hold your Aces ceremony at the Cathedral. You join in spirit the tens of thousands of single units spread through five hundred dioceses of the world honoring Mary in this annual ceremony.

It is also a privilege for me to be able to talk to you about the aims and purposes of your organization.

In the course of the year, a bishop addresses many lay groups on a variety of subjects. Some occasions stand out as more significant than others. For example, the two adult confirmation ceremonies on Pentecost impress me as being particularly important. Most of those confirmed are converts and their potential for bringing new converts into the Church is tremendous.

Another standout is the annual Communion Breakfast of the four local centers of the Nocturnal Adoration Society. No one can begin to estimate the good these men do for the city by their prayers and hours of reparation.

This Aces ceremony is another such occasion. Although your Comitium, both the active and auxiliary members, has increased greatly in size these past few years, it is comparatively small in numbers.

Yet I can think of no other lay group in the city which can equal the good you accomplish through your direct apostolate to souls in our parishes. You men and women are really putting Catholic Action into practice.

You are not here this afternoon however, to hear words of praise for your efforts. You are here to reconsecrate your selves, individually and collectively, to the service of Mary. My part in the ceremony is to point out ways in which you can give better service to souls and thus improve your potential for good.

**THE CHIEF CONCERN** of each pastor of a Catholic parish is to be "another Christ" to everyone dwelling in his assigned territory. This goal is almost impossible to achieve today, particularly in the large city parishes.

One are the simple days when the priest could come into direct contact with each member of his flock. Gone are the days when the parish societies were limited to the Holy Name Society, the Rosary Society, the Sodality.

Now the organizational program of each parish is complex and involved. In the average parish you have some sort of meeting practically every night in the week.

Add the youth program, including scouting activities, the catechetical work in the parochial school and the religious



Legion of Mary members of the Rochester Diocese kneel at Blessed Virgin shrine in Sacred Heart Cathedral to renew their act of consecration at rites in ceremony led by Auxiliary Bishop Lawrence B. Casey and attended by priest directors of the parish Legion branches.

instruction of public grammar and high school pupils, church services and confessions, visits to the hospitals and communion calls to the sick, preparation of seminaries, convert instruction, parochial correspondence, social calls by people who have personal problems and the follow-up work attendant upon these calls, parish financial administration and this is a time-consuming chore, and the time involved in planning a necessary parish improvement program.

All these projects combine to limit the time available to the priest for the direct contact work in the parish which is so necessary.

**COUPLED WITH THIS** intensive and varied program, is the current shortage of priests. This June there will be only eleven priests ordained for the Diocese of Rochester. We could use many more in places where they are badly needed. We have in some parishes two or three priests trying to do the work of four or five. They do the best they can but they cannot do the best they can but they cannot adequately cover the territory assigned to them.

These conditions may be a partial explanation of the leakage from the Church, the Catholics who drift away from Mother Church due to lack of instruction or direct contact with the priests.

I recall confirming a class of 75 candidates at Sampson Air Base about three years ago. Originally the class numbered 175, but the chaplain had to weed out 100 candidates, explaining to me that these ladies were so ignorant of the funda-

mental of the Faith that they were being held up for further instruction.

Most of them had come from metropolitan areas of the East, the large cities, and in a good percentage of cases had seldom attended church since their First Communion.

**YOUR PRIESTS**, aware of these conditions, wish that they could multiply their presence, wish that they could have assistants in quantity and quality to meet adequately their responsibilities. That's where you members of the Legion of Mary come in. You are playing a vital role as you help your parish priests spread the Kingdom of God in your area.

As you go out two by two to do your apostolic work, much after the fashion in which the Lord sent His disciples, you are making good on the implicit pledge you took on your Confirmation Day to spread the Faith.

It is interesting to note that in the New Testament version of Father Ronald Knox, the traditional passage, "Going, therefore, teach ye all nations," and so on reads this way: "The task I have appointed for you is to go out and bear fruit. . . . Go out all over the world and preach the Gospel to the whole of creation. . . . You trust therefore go out making disciples of all nations." What a difference that little word "out" makes!

"GO OUT and bear fruit," No question about it, the apostolic part of your work as Legionnaires is hard. To "hit the asphalt" week after week; to persevere in "keeping to the things that matter"; to enter every home, no matter how repulsive; to meet with setbacks, even insults; to keep on doing it, is hard, very hard.

However, as you go out to do Christ's work, His Mother Mary clothes you in strong armor. For one thing, you know the purpose of your mission, what it's all about. The directives in your standing instructions seem at first cold and arbitrary, but experience shows that they give you a most providential technique to help the priest multiply his presence in the world.

At the praesidium meetings I have been privileged to attend, I have been struck most of all by your earnestness and your absolute fidelity to the principles of the Legion, your devotion to duty.

There is a "no nonsense" atmosphere about your meetings. You won't find there that easy-going, casual "coffee-break" attitude on the part of the members. Everything is strictly business. That is why you get things done.

**THE LEGION OF MARY** has a discipline that is almost military. Nothing interferes with your weekly meeting. Only physical impossibility, such as sickness, or moral impossibility, such as the emergency care of a sick relative, excuses a member from attendance. This standing instruction insures regular work and guarantees continuity in the business at hand, plus developing in you self-denial and self-discipline.

**YOUR GOOD WORKS**, however, would be as "sounding brass" unless they were backed up by prayer. Part of your strong armor as you go forth to do battle for Mary, is the power generated by your own

interior life. Your priest-director in his weekly "Allocution on the Handbook," the spiritual talk on various phases of your work, gradually forms you in the interior life and gives you his priestly outlook on the missionary work awaiting you at every turn.

And at this point I should like to pay tribute to the wisdom of the founders of the Legion of Mary for giving the priest that control of the work which is the unique characteristic of the Legion. The presence of the priest in its individual praesidium guarantees a lay apostolate, lay in its government and operation, yet perfectly obedient and loyal to the authority of the Church.

As we said, you would not progress very far nor persevere long in the Legion without laying the solid foundations of the spiritual life in your own souls. And here again, the founders of the Legion of Mary have shown their supernatural shrewdness in making such a meager demand on you piety.

At first sight, it seems surprising that the Legion asks so little in the way of prayer from you active members. Beyond the recitation of the Rosary and other prayers at your regular meetings, you are required only to say the Catena each day. This Catena or chain of prayer compresses within a brief compass the essential role Our Lady plays in your work. The Catena's power and quality to meet adequately the indispensable channel through which flows to us the effects of Christ's redemptive power. "To Jesus through Mary" is no idle phrase.

But your prayer life does not end with the recitation of the Catena. It is only the beginning. As you go about your work, the impact of sinful humanity, of religious neglect, of spiritual mediocrity, forces you to your knees.

You come to realize that only a supernatural power can achieve the supernatural transformation in the lives of careless Catholics you meet. You are driven more and more to a feeling of utter dependence on God and His Mother. So you develop, stage by stage, under the guidance of your priest-director, the full flowering of your interior life. The recitation of the Rosary, Mass and Communion, a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, meditation and spiritual reading become part of your daily program.

From the humble beginning of the Catena Legionis, you become true servants of Mary. Because you are devoted to her service, you grow daily in the love of God and your neighbor.

A word about your apostolic work which is the effect or outpouring of the prayer-life you have developed in your own souls. Those whom you visit must feel that you are genuinely interested in them and want to give what help you can. The give what help you can. The give what help you can. The give what help you can.

Because you are essentially humble people there is not much danger that you will ever adopt a superior attitude towards those you visit. That would be fatal. Certainly, your attitude is not one of slumping or looking down in pity on the poor of body and soul. You are too conscious of your own faults ever to "high-lit" anyone else.

In the case of sinners, the lapsed, the careless, remember that no visit to bad Catholics is ever fruitless. If nothing more, it is a spur to their conscience. And you have known insults on the first visit to give way to a friendlier reception on the second. The grace of God works in strange and mysterious ways, bearing out the old truth that "every impossibility is divided into thirty-nine steps, each of which is possible."

Probably, the three qualities you need most to achieve effective results from your visits are patience, perseverance and above all, charity. There is only one way to hard or indifferent hearts: it is the sympathy, gentleness and understanding.

The gentle St. Francis de Sales said, "You'll catch more flies with a spoonful of honey than a barrel full of vinegar."

As a final footnote to this technique of apostolic work, keep your sense of humor. Granted that your work is serious business because it involves immortal souls, but don't become too tense or rigid. In some cases, your motto should be, "Easy does it." A well-developed sense of humor, an appreciation of the incongruous, can keep you mentally well-balanced and help smooth out some of the rough spots in life.

**PART OF THIS** gathering today are many auxiliaries men and women, who for various

valid reasons are unable to give active service as members of the Legion of Mary. Instead, they further the work of Mary's Army by their prayers and acts of self-denial. Milton said, "They also serve who only stand and wait." The personal message printed in this afternoon's program says it better.

Our Lady addresses you Auxiliaries in this fashion: "You are to the Legion of Mary what wings are to a bird. With many and faithful auxiliaries not even the mountains will stay the course of my Legion. Without you, the Legion would be brought to a stop by the slightest obstacle."

You have noticed the platform here in the sanctuary. Tonight, at the beginning of the mission given by the Passionist Fathers, the crucifix will be placed in solemn ceremony on this platform for the duration of the mission. But the point is that the priests, the sisters, the children, the adult parishioners of Sacred Heart Cathedral have been praying for three months for the success of this mission.

**NO ONE CAN** begin to estimate the number of souls who will return to God's friendship as a result of these prayers.

It is the same way with you. As the active Legion members go forth on their apostolic work, part of their strong armor is the knowledge that several thousand Auxiliaries in this city are praying for them and their work, as well as praying for the thousands of praesidia throughout the world. The knowledge of the power of prayer prompts me to ask you to enlist new Auxiliaries to join you in Mary's growing army of prayer.

**THIS CEREMONY** is held on the eve of the feast of the Annunciation of Our Lady. In your handbook it states that the annual Aces ceremony, the Legion of Mary's solemn expression of its union with and dependence on Mary, its Queen, and the renewal, individual and collective, of the Legionary declaration of fealty, should take place as close as possible to the feast of the Annunciation.

There are different good reasons for doing this. I merely mention one you might be tempted to overlook. In the dramatic episode of the Annunciation, when the angel Gabriel

announced to Mary that she was to be the Mother of God, he also told her that her cousin Elizabeth had conceived a son in her old age.

One might think that Mary, overjoyed at the knowledge that she was to be the Mother of God, would forget everything else. But no, this humble servant of God saw in the Angel's word an invitation, a suggestion it was impossible for her to ignore. It would mean a long and wearisome journey but what Mary saw as most urgent was that she could be useful in action.

There are people who do not express themselves by words. They talk but little. You must get to know them gradually through their actions. Mary's words in Scripture are comparatively few. She did not

have much to say in time of trouble. Her love showed itself instinctively in action — and her actions were always so swift and direct.

In her, you members of the Legion of Mary have your model — love in action. May she bless and guide and help you as you work to make every Catholic a saint, every Catholic an apostle.

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**BOOK SHELF**

**Sister Gervaise**

Sr. Margaret Teresa, Nazareth College

**THE LIVELY ARTS OF SISTER GEVAISE**, a novel by John L. Bonn, S.J. Kennedy '57, 227 pp. \$3.50. All Catholic bookstores.

Thank you, Father Bonn. It takes the light touch to tell this nun's story. It takes true tragicomic vision to capture the every-day sallying forth of the teaching Sister to make room for Christ in the world, her inevitable tangling with windmills or scattering of sheep hidden in the high dust of events; her return homeward with various bruises as the only visible gain.

She returns home, though. There are about 100,000 of her kind in these United States, and not one of them has made a mistake: He awaits them. "All which thy child's mistake/Fancies as lost, I have stored for thee at home/Rise, clasp My hand, and come!"

**SISTER GEVAISE**, whose dad is an actor and whose superiors have sent her to Catholic Theater School, puts on Murder in the Cathedral with a parochial high school cast, in a parish that prefers minstrels.

She builds an audience by countless phone-calls, induces action in a Sister-proof janitor with nostalgic memories of how the men put the chairs away after the minstrels, steers Rosemary and Joe through first love without harm to their dignity, wrecks classrooms and borrowed dresses and her loyal Superior's tranquility of order, says most proper prayers and gets half her proper sleep, wakens here and there a taste for the best, and wonders,

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