

LEGIONARY LITTLENESS

The subject about which I have been instructed to talk to you this evening is the one of "Legionary Littleness". The idea is that we are far too conscious of our own littleness in the Legion. We realise our own great defects and our inadequacy. As a result we become paralysed and we refuse works and responsibilities and in that way we cripple the whole purpose of the Legion. So now for a few words about that littleness.

Instead of acting as a harness or a brake to our efforts in this way, the thought of our littleness should act as a stimulus to us, and we should actually gain courage from our inadequacy. We can say with Our Lady: "Because of my littleness, God has done great things to me."

Speaking in Rome Pope Paul VI said: "The Legion of Mary knows how to use the little people." That is the wonderful thing about it - its dealing with the little people. The little people are being taken into the ranks of the Legion and are being used - with great results.

If we are depressed by this thought of our littleness, let us consider the entourage of Our Lord Himself. It is really extraordinary to consider how He cast Himself upon the smallest possible stage and amongst not only the ordinary people, but amongst those who were socially well below the average. So humble and so "little" did He make Himself, that He did not enjoy even privacy. He was, it might be said, born publicly, and He died publicly. The name of Nazareth was indeed (like some of our own villages) a term of opprobrium amongst the Jews. It was a sort of jeer. "Can any good come out of Nazareth?" This lowliness was round Him at His birth, was

with Him during His whole life, and accompanied Him to His death.

When He came to choose His apostles He took the ordinary, and very ordinary people, and for this reason they were despised. You might say that He made a great mistake in doing this. You know the remark made by Lloyd George when he was warring greatly against the Conservatives? He said that they were the sort of men that would not have accepted Christianity originally unless it had been preached to them by 12 dukes! Definitely then, Our Lord acted from quite another point of view. His disciples did not stand out in any way - not even from the point of view of ability. Yet those men were His own selection: none of them came just by chance. Every single one of them was called by Our Lord Himself in that very deliberate manner. There was in each case a very definite vocation. And what was the work given to these simple people? They were to undertake the greatest task that the world has ever known or imagined. They were to overthrow in whole, or in part, the religious beliefs of the whole world. And not only the religious beliefs, but every human idea, for every idea in the world is affected by the Christian creed. "The best Communists are all people who have been affected by the Christian idea".

Well, to pass from that great thing to another great thing, let us come to the Legion. Its origin is characterised by that same note of littleness. At the first meeting, the numbers were not great, in fact quite the reverse, but there was present the great Christian note of having a mission, and the members were strangely confident about the future. They were confident because they were leaning upon Our Lady.

Can we not then take it as a fact that God is insisting very

much upon the quality of littleness as the foundation of His works? I do not mean by this that He will not use great and noble people. He does, because those people conform to His other requirements. God has to use everybody and every instrument which will lend itself to His hand. You have heard of Attila, the great king of the Huns, called by the people of Europe "the scourge of God". Well, God did not exactly use him, but He permitted Attila to live.

God, so far from being held back by littleness, seeks it out and will use even the smallest and most defective instrument. I have often seen the weakest and most defective and even sinful elements used by God. The essential thing is to offer oneself with the knowledge that we are inadequate, and give ourselves to Him in that spirit of humility and faith. We find again and again that the great ones are left unused and the very simple elements are taken up by Him instead. If we possess this quality of simplicity and humility God will use us, because in using us He will at the same time lift us up, which is the first thing He wants. To be little, without esteem in the eyes of the world is not a disqualification in the eyes of God. Indeed humility is an advantage. So let us not talk of lack of confidence because of our inadequacy. If you say "I refuse this responsibility because I am not adequate to it" it means you are denying the power of God to make use of your inadequacy. Remember, for you to feel otherwise would be a most conceited frame of mind. So let us accept the tasks set to us and meanwhile glory in our littleness.

This brings me to a very important thought. It is not because of our littleness alone that God picks us for a certain mission, but because of other things as well. Consider for a moment Our Lady. She was chosen for the greatest of all missions, but she

was not chosen for her littleness alone, but because of many other things as well. For her faith, her heroism, for her self-sacrifice, for her purity. The eye of God looked on her and chose her. But none of these things would have caused her to be chosen if she had been full of the idea of her own adequacy - for then the element of littleness would have been lacking.

Similarly with ourselves. It is not enough that we possess the right sense of our littleness, we must possess other things as well. But these are all in keeping with the original quality of littleness. You will say "What sort of things?" I would venture to say that in the Legion system there is proposed to us a way of life which will be adequate and which will enable God to descend upon us and use us in the way that He desires. Our membership of the Legion means attendance at a weekly meeting and the doing of a weekly work. These in turn entail the doing of many other very simple acts, done in a spirit of faith and in union with Our Lady. If we do these things in the right spirit we are ripe for being used, and it is essential for us to understand that those elements are the important things in all Christian work, and not qualities of genius and talent and other things which are the property of the very few. Indeed it would seem to be the lesson of all Christian life that God does not use such people. He uses the person, however little, that can be found conforming to the pattern which I have described. That pattern provides the foundation upon which the very greatest building can erect itself.

Let us not be afraid, but let us, in the spirit of simplicity, reach out for the most difficult tasks, venture out in the spirit of faith, and seek responsibility. If things appear to be beyond your power, still accept the task allotted to you, confident that you are

entitled to the very special grace of God. Remember that God simply has to use you in that way if you will only let Him. But remember also that we must adhere completely to the Legion system. If we want the grace of our membership in our Legion tasks we must not set aside the rules and go our own way. That would be like owning a motor car and not using the works in the proper fashion. We all know what would happen in that case. So it is in the Legion. Having come into the movement lend yourself to it without reservation. Be simple, be humble, choose the menial tasks. If you assert yourself too much, picking and choosing, you are showing an absence of the littleness which is the foundation of spiritual building.

I think it might be said that in pointing out this way of life of "littleness" to us, the Legion is a great boon to us all. For such mechanism is necessary in human life. I do not say that sanctity cannot be reached by another road. Many people have become saints on their own, but it is not the usual or the ordinary way. Until more or less our own time that idea of organising the ordinary people was not fully understood, but it is a fact that people must be helped on to their destiny. It is not sufficient to point out a duty and then to leave people to work things out for themselves, and so Pius XI said we must provide machinery to help people on. Now in the Legion we have such machinery and it has produced a great amount of sanctity amongst its members. I have only to point out one person to bring this point home to you. You have all either known or at least heard of Edel Quinn and of her heroic Legion adventure in Africa. Without the Legion what would Edel Quinn's position now be? Holy she would be, in any set of circumstances, but perhaps it would have been a very different sort of holiness than that which she

achieved. Little she certainly was and in addition she did not even enjoy physical health. But having come into the Legion she was amenable to its system and accepted a task which was definitely beyond her. For remember, an African adventure such as hers, is one for the fittest amongst us. But Edel had the littleness - that supreme littleness before God. She leaned on God. She put all her faith in Him, and see what has been brought about! She has actually changed the whole system of missionary endeavour. Her work in Africa led to Mgr. Riberi's conviction that Legionary machinery and endeavour was essential in the missionary field. And let us look for a moment at China. The tremendous resistance of the Christians there in face of the Communist terror is due to the work of Mgr. Riberi, and he was taught by Edel Quinn.

We must also recognise that any mechanism which aims at doing spiritual good must have Our Lady. The members must understand her place and significance, and must act accordingly. And why? Because all our efforts are only part of the maternal effort of Our Lady. We are trying to bring grace to souls. But that is the work that she has always been carrying on, and we can do no part of that work without her. Whether consciously or not, she is there all the time as the centre of our work.

These are the things which the Legion offers to you, it requires only one thing to "deliver the goods" - and that is that you really give yourself to it. There is nothing in the Legion which is not a part of common Christianity. It is just simply plain, everyday Catholicism. Leaning on it, you will not fail.