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CHRIST LIVETH IN ME

"For I, through the law, am dead to the law, that I may live to God; with Christ I am nailed to the cross.

"And I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me. And that I live now in the flesh: I live in the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered himself for me." (Gal. 2, 20.)

The *Handbook* insists that the Legionary must be always on duty. Those of us who have been in circulation around the country as sorts of Legionary tourists, visiting functions and having to talk there, have amplified this general statement by the explanation that the time of the Legionary meeting and work is only a sort of school-time; that its purpose is to educate you for the non-school hours; that it is not at all for itself that it exists but for the general run of your life. That is a supremely important conception for you. Because it means that if you are only a Legionary during your Legionary time, you are a Legionary failure, even though you may be working heroically and performing valuable work during those three or four hours per week.

The purpose of the Legion is that you shall learn in your Legionary hours the ideal of living, and that you will then go forth and apply that ideal to the everyday hours.

What is that ideal which you have to learn?

Christ Lives Through Us

The life of the Church is the life of Christ continued. In a measure the same can be said of the life of each unit of the

Church, each one of us. We poor, weak creatures are only able to reproduce that life in parts—in broken fragments, I might say. But the main idea remains the same: that it is our mission to carry on in the world that life of Christ, making Him live again in our own days and circumstances.

Of what kind was the life of Christ which the Church is intended to continue in the world? It was a lowly, very hard life, a frustrated life, contradicted even unto persecution—carried to the extremest limit. But we must not for one moment think that there was no other side to it. There was. Taken as a whole, His life was one of confident strength, and its lowliness and sufferings only served to set off that fact the more brilliantly. It was a life full of colour and character; so dazzling as almost to overwhelm the people about Him; so striking that many to whom He spoke but a sentence left all and followed Him; so compelling that even second-hand—by which I mean through mere written accounts and at a great distance of time—the very thought of Him has been able to drive people to follow Him and to suffer grievous things even as He did and merely because He did.

The Power of Christ

That is the note I want to stress this evening: the note of power in His life. The essential feature of His life was power. He dominated the elements, made the dead to live again, and in every other way rose superior to the impossible. Even His mild speech thrilled with that same tone of power—the Scriptures quote for us the bystanders' comment: "He speaks as one having authority." To use a word which seems foolish applied to Him, He was devout—wrapped all the time in prayer. But side by side with that, He was dynamic in the fullest sense of that misused word; He

radiated force. Everything about Him possessed character. You cannot read a word about Him without realising what an abyss yawned between Him and any other person—which, of course, is only what we should expect. His influence made itself felt in every way, by His personal magnetism and by the shock of His miracles. He drew the eyes of all to Him; He impelled them to listen to Him, to follow Him about in great numbers. Men simply could not be indifferent. They had to take sides one way or the other—for or against Him. Certain we can be—beyond anything else—that in the whole history of mankind no other man ever made such a personal impression upon the people around him. To use the modern phrase, no one ever made such a hit as Christ. No other man ever will or could. Call up before the parade of memory any of the great figures of history, and you will realise that all of them have feet of clay. There is a saying that no man is a hero to his valet; but Christ was a hero to His valets. He had no feet of clay.

Christ's Power in His Church

If my original contention is true—that the mission of the Church reproduces the life of Christ in all its phases, then obviously we must find the dynamic note pervading, dominant in, the life of the Church. Disguised, no doubt, it will be by reason of the fact that there is diffused among a great body of people, and with much base admixture, what He held united in His own person. But even though disguised or dimmed by human weakness, the qualities of Christ must shine forth in His people if He is really living in them. Therefore it would be a very bad sign if the Church in any place were living practically unnoticed or not bothered about, too colourless even to attract disfavour or persecution. Obviously there would be something deplorably wrong there.

But you may retort: "What about the lowly and obscure life of Christ?" I answer that we must look upon the life of the Church—just as we must take the life of Christ—as a whole, even in each individual place. Just as we see that the grand and the challenging was the dominant characteristic of the life of Christ, so must it be in the life of the Church, and that in each place, and in each community of the faithful. That sheerly dynamic note simply must be present in some form or another.

The Church Lives Through Us

It would be a tragic thing if, in any place, the actions of its members toned down the Church to such an extent that men looking at it could discern nothing of the characteristics of Christ; nothing virile, appealing, inspiring, conquering, grand; nothing but a slave of its environment, something that has made terms with the world. That would be a fatal thing for us as a body and for each one of us; for we grow weak with the Church. We are the organs of the Church, the cells of the Church; it lives through us, and only through us. For better or worse we contribute to its life. That is a breath-taking responsibility. How unutterably dreadful it would be if those acts of ours, which are supposed to have such a great purpose, were to cause men to see nothing of might or beauty in the Church, so that they judge it to have fallen below even worldly levels. Woe, woe to us then! For in that day and place the Church would have ceased to attract, and even its own people, those born in the fold and nurtured in the sacraments, would fall away from it like needles fall away from a de-electrified magnet.

Stuck in the Trenches?

Recently a discussion took place about a certain large body

of people who are educated, intelligent, idealistic and Catholic, but who could not be described as interested in, still less enthusiastic for the Church. Their attitude was rightly described as one of cynicism; and that cynicism was analysed as being a compromise between faith and contempt. Those people had the faith, and the natural inclination to practise it. Yet they had in their hearts conceived the idea that the Church was a stodgy, rather weak product; stuck in the trenches, so to speak; and without a solution for any of the great problems. We know that to be the opposite to the truth, and we are reminded of Chesterton's classical remark that Christianity has been found difficult and not even tried. But still the position becomes distressing and dangerous if such an idea tends to gain a foothold, especially at the present time when ACTION is idealised and idolised, and when great things are being dared and done for purely worldly ends. That sort of balance between accepting the Faith and rejecting it cannot last very long—only about one generation, I would opine. Inevitably the next stage would be that of non-practice.

Action and Holiness

But is not that miserable attitude all too common in the world to-day? Look and you will find that irreverence towards the Church most terribly in evidence inside as well as outside the fold. In his encyclical, "Mit brennender Sorge," that doughty, mighty man, Pius XI, refers to it and prescribes the remedy—none other, he insists, but "the closest union of apostolate and personal sanctification for those to whose hands is committed the keeping and increase of the Kingdom of God. Only in this way can it be proved to the present generation, and especially to the adversaries of the Church, that the salt of the earth has not lost its

savour, that the leaven of Christendom has not become stale, but is capable and ready to bring to the people of to-day who are caught in doubt and error, in indifference and perplexity, in weariness in believing and in separation from God, the spiritual renewal and rejuvenation, of which they stand, whether they admit it or not, in greater need than ever before. A Christianity in which all members watch over themselves, that strips off all mere outward show and worldliness, that takes the commandments of God seriously, and proves itself in love of God and active love of one's neighbour, can and must be the pattern and leader to a world sick to its very heart and seeking for support and guidance, if unspeakable misfortune and a cataclysm far beyond all imagination is not to burst over it."

Charter for Legionaries

How every word of that should echo responsively in your minds, because it is only what the Legion of Mary has been saying to you all the time. Your sacred duty, mark his words (for he places such as you Legionaries in the sublime classification of those who keep and increase the Kingdom of God) is that you must prove to this cynical, unbelieving world that the salt has not lost its savour nor the leaven become stale. That is your Charter.

I repeat that the Church only has its existence through you its members. Without you it is only an abstraction. Only through you can religion be shown forth as the dominating, captivating thing it really is. Religion is Christ, and than that, no more beautiful thing can be dreamt of. Yet it is only by you it can be realised. Therefore, each one must show some line or part or feature of the living Christ; so that, together, you may—like a cinema projector—cast that radiant thing on to the screen of life.

Hence you must rise superior to your environment, no matter what its difficulties may be. You must dominate it—if necessary and by His help—by the sheerest miracles; and we need not fear that even those will be lacking, if needed. You must make men look upon religion. You must make them wonder; you must make them admire; you must break through that cynicism of theirs, so that those who had been scoffing will set themselves to pray.

When you find people cynical do not be over-hasty to condemn them. Rather reason out the "Why." The answer to that "Why" may form a condemnation of ourselves. For cynicism is not altogether an unworthy product. In its essence it is disgust, despair, disillusionment. Any idealist who is disappointed may become a cynic, but the idealism has not been destroyed. It is merely submerged. It can be brought to light again.

Lopsided Devotion

Similarly, criticisms of religion often have their roots in disappointment or misunderstanding. There are many headlines of devotion in evidence which are false and ugly, and which prejudice people against religion. Take one for instance—that conception of religion which is known by the expressive term of "chapel-hunting." Those who denounce the latter are not necessarily—as many of you possibly imagine—making an attack on religion in general. In reality they are attacking a libel on religion.

What exactly is this "chapel-hunting"? It is a form of piety which is divorced from the love and service of our neighbour, and even from the details of everyday personal duty and honour. Look around and you will see the type to which that opprobrious title can fairly be applied. There they go, visiting the churches and apparently assiduously praying

there, but justifying themselves in no other department of life. That lopsided tribe is not uncommon. In some places (especially in rural areas), for want of anything better it is generally supposed to represent the authentic, "stream-lined" model of advanced religion. As a natural result the popular mind is biased against the whole idea of devotion; so much so that when it calls a person a saint it means to imply something not pleasant. Thereby the status of religion is impaired; its standards are lowered and falsified; with the inevitable consequence that the standards of the world hold unchallenged sway. That is disastrous. It must not be. Those low false ideals must be replaced by a Christianity which—as Pius XI says—"takes the Commandments of God seriously and proves itself in love of God and active love of one's neighbour."

Make the Church Attract Idealism

This can only be done by over-shadowing what is there at present. As Christians, you must rise far above the merely respectable, the worthy, the ordinary. You must in your own life exhibit the true standards of religion. That manifesting of the Faith in its lustre and its might must embrace every department of human existence from Pontiff to Caesar. Every day of your life you must challenge the world in its every interest; and every faculty and energy you possess must be mobilised in that clash. You must outvie the world, outpace it, outlast it, outlove it, in everything—in science, in art, in business, in sport, in achievement of every kind. If you do not, you are not transmitting the spirit of Catholicism. You have to overpower, to overwhelm, to overmaster by sheer quality. If you do this, you will make the Church shine in the world as Christ shone among men. You will make the current standards look drab, cowardly, mean,

miserable; so that the Church will attract idealism, and men will turn to the Church with all their hearts, just as men were drawn to Christ in the days of His earthly career.

Legion-Time is School-Time

It is that wider life which is in view when one talks about Legion-time being but a school-time. In your Legion-time you must learn to live superbly in order that you may live superbly in the other hours. I think that Legionaries—even the comparative newcomers—do far from badly in their Legionary employments. It is impressive to see what they are prepared to do and to endure in their various tasks. Plainly they have caught the Legionary ideal of serving Christ in those they work for, even when those persons are of vile behaviour and disfigured by repulsive qualities. Furthermore, they have grasped the secondary idea of working with Our Lady, so that it is she rather than they who ministers to Her Son. This they do sweetly, often super-humanly, as witnessed the other day, when a fierce attack by drink-crazed residents of a Legion hostel left Legionaries strewn around like the wounded on a battlefield. But do we hear of the work being thereby abandoned, or of any the less tenderness being subsequently lavished on the delinquents?

With that spirit of sweet strength do Legionaries fill their Legion hours. But do they in practice remember that those hours are only a school-time, and that the spirit of those hours must then flow into and fill the other hours of their lives, so that Christ can use them to live in?

Christ Works in Us

And there is not merely question of harnessing the best that is in you in the service of the Church. There is far more

at stake than that. It is this. When you thus place the best that is in you at His disposal, Our Lord takes hold of what you give. He lives in it, and He exhibits Himself by it, and He will use it divinely for His purposes; and by divinely I mean out of all proportion. He does not merely *utilise* that contribution of yours, which at best is feeble. I have said He lives in it Himself. It is not you who work, but Christ who worketh in you. To use Father Faber's phrase, He mixes Himself up with you. He magnifies your petty efforts to strange dimensions; and ordinary, well-meaning persons find to their amazement that they have been grasped by His power, and availed of for His own most vital purposes; so that the fate of persons and continents, aye of generations, is made to hinge on their activities.

Of that your own society forms an interesting example. Consider the group of everyday persons who formed the nucleus of the Legion. In an unpretending way they came together and proceeded to give to God the tiny best that was in them. See what happened. The world vibrates under the spiritual progeny of that little band. And who knows what part the Legion has yet to play! It is only a question of wholesale, selfless offering. Granted that, God will continue to regard His handmaid.

Building with Mary

But have I been forgetting something? In all this talk about our destiny in Christ, I have only once used the name of her who is, as St. Thomas says, more Christian than all other Christians put together. But of course she is to be inferred in every word that I have spoken. By God's arrangement she is vital to that Christian destiny. She is inseparable from everything that belongs to religion. No grace is gained or given other than through her. In all our

work and in all our plans we must be mindful that he who builds without her builds in vain. She is not the foundation of the building, but she is an essential part of it. She is not the complete mixture of holiness, but she is a necessary ingredient. Devotion to her does not exempt us in any way from virtue or effort, or from anything else that we should be contributing. But without her, all your thought and effort and planning and everything else will be sterile. Not Christ, but the spirit of the world, will live in you.