Ten Positive Effects of Legion of Mary Membership
By Fr. Francis Peffley

I'd like to propose to you ten positive effects of being a member of the Legion of Mary.

The first is that the Legion is a proven "school for saints". Frank Duff, the founder of the Legion of Mary, once said that "the Legion makes saints and makes them by the bushel". When we consider that an organization only 75 years old already has five lay members whose cause for canonization has been introduced, it is truly amazing: Frank Duff, its founder; Edel Quinn, a missionary to Africa (already made Venerable); Alfie Lambe, a missionary to South America; Michael Eking, the first legionary of Africa; and Joaquina Lucas of the Philippines. The Legion is not just an organization but a way of life, a vocation of the lay apostolate, and a school for sanctity.

If we want to become good at something, we have to practice it every week, such as a sport, a hobby, a musical instrument. If we want to "get good" at holiness, we must practice it every week as well. And the Legion gives us that opportunity; it provides an ideal expression of the Catholic vocation. It can actually become a real vocation for the married, the single, the separated. Even a priest or a nun can have a special Legion vocation. (The Legion's founder, Frank Duff, never married, devoting his whole life to serving God. But it is said that there were four or five women who were interested in him. He was once asked why didn't marry one of those admiring secretaries of his. Frank Duff replied, "Why should I make one woman miserable when I can keep at least a half dozen waiting in hopeful expectation!")

The Legion has also had as many as four thousand members in China who were martyred for their Catholic Faith and their Legion membership between 1949 and 1953. It is also believed that as many as forty thousand legionaries suffered during that time under the communist persecution of the Church. Yes, the Legion is a proven school for saints. It is a unique privilege and great blessing to be counted in its membership.

The second positive effect of Legion membership is the opportunity to fulfill what Canon Law and Vatican II say to each one of us. Canon Law and the documents of Vatican II state very clearly that the lay apostolate is not optional. We have the obligation to spread our Catholic Faith. Vatican II states in the Decree on the Laity that "The Christian vocation is by its very nature a vocation to the apostolate...a member who does not work at the building up the body [of Christ] must be considered useless both to the Church and to himself...From the fact of their union with Christ, the head, flows the laymens' rights and duties to be apostles." (A.A.2,3) This clearly indicates that the lay apostolate is not optional. A Catholic is bound by the very nature of Catholicism to be apostolic. Part and parcel of Catholicism is evangelization -- to spread our Faith. Vatican II further states, "Inserted as they are in the Mystical Body of Christ by baptism and strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit in confirmation, it is by the Lord himself that they are assigned to the apostolate...On all Christians, accordingly, rests the noble obligation of working to bring all men throughout the world to hear and accept the divine message of salvation." (A.A.3) As this demonstrates, Vatican II is emphatic that every Catholic is bound by baptism and by confirmation to be apostolic and to spread the Faith.
Furthermore, Canon Law obliges us to be apostolic, as is stated in Canon 225: "Since all lay people are assigned to the apostolate by baptism and confirmation, they are bound by the general obligation and they have the right, whether as individuals or organizations or in associations, to strive so that the divine message of salvation may be known and accepted by all people throughout the world." The Code of Canon Law is the rulebook of the Catholic Church. Legion of Mary membership makes it actually easy to follow the rules and be a good Catholic, but it does more: the Legion offers a proven method and motivation for sanctity, thus fulfilling Canon 210 which states: "All Christian faithful must make an effort, in accord with their own condition, to live a holy life and to promote the growth of the Church and its continual sanctification."

The third result of Legion membership is that it teaches the member the Catholic Faith and gives weekly spiritual direction and formation. Every Legion meeting attended is a class in adult Catholic education. One of the biggest problems of the Church in the United States today is that most Catholics do not know their Catholic Faith. The Legion addresses that problem by supplying weekly spiritual formation as well as weekly education in the Catholicism. The Legion handbook contains one hundred and seventy-three quotations from Sacred Scripture, exerpts from the writings of sixty-two saints, references more than forty Church documents, and over forty quotations from popes.

The Legion also teaches apologetics by way of assigning works involving the duty of explaining the Faith to others. Important Catholic teachings, namely the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ, Mary's motherhood of souls, as well as De Montfort's True Devotion, help members to live that same Catholic lifestyle that shaped the holiness of people like John Paul II, Mother Teresa, Maximilian Kolbe, Matt Talbot, and many others.

During the weekly Legion meeting spiritual formation is found in rosary and the Legion prayers, the spiritual reading and discussion, the talk by the spiritual director, as well as the wisdom and apostolic techniques learned from the reports which are presented and discussed. Every time legionaries come together for a meeting it is as if they are gathered at the cenacle with Our Lady, as in the days of the first apostles. Every Legion meeting becomes the Upper Room where modern-day apostles gather together in a cenacle of prayer with Mary, asking the Holy Spirit to come upon them so that they can do great things for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

The fourth effect of being in the Legion - which you might think a little strange - is that it can help your hair grow! A true story concerns the late Father Francis Ripley of Liverpool, England who was working with some ex-soldiers as a hospital chaplain after World War II. Father wanted to start the Legion in the hospital among the patients and staff and was recruiting members. One German soldier had been in an explosion in a tank and had lost all his hair which had never grown back. Fr. Ripley asked him to join the Legion of Mary. The soldier asked Father whether the Blessed Mother would help his hair grow back if he joined and Fr. Ripley said that he would not be surprised if that happened. Fr. Ripley states emphatically that three months after this bald man joined the Legion he had the most beautiful head of blond hair! (I told my dad this story and he said that it has never worked for him, and he's been in the Legion 40 years!) The principle in this fourth blessing is that Our Lord or the Blessed Mother are never outdone in generosity. If we give them something, if we sacrifice some time, effort or energy doing their work, they always give something in return. Perhaps a
child or grandchild will come back to church; maybe an un-churched spouse will convert to the Faith. There will always be some special grace because of our Legion membership.

During my years at college I asked one of my good friends to join the Legion. He declined, giving the reason that he needed all his time to study: he was taking the History of Philosophy, a difficult two-semester course. He failed the course in the first semester, and when the next one started, I asked him again. I mentioned that Our Lady would help him see to it that he would find time to study, and besides, he couldn't do any worse than fail the course! He did join the Legion, and passed the course in the second semester with a C grade, a fairly respectable achievement for that course. This student friend learned to love the Legion which sparked the call of a vocation. He went on to the seminary, was ordained seven years ago, and today is a Catholic priest.

The fifth positive aspect of Legion membership has its root in the book of Deuteronomy and concerns the principle of tithing - the giving of ten percent to God. While in Scripture this generally refers to finances or the fruit of the harvest, this principle should also be applied to our time and effort. Out of the one hundred and sixty-eight hours in a week, tithing commits ten percent of that time to God, which would include attending Mass, daily prayer, spiritual reading, but seldom includes apostolic works. It is not always a significant sacrifice to put a check into the collection basket on Sunday; it can be a more meaningful sacrifice to give up a few hours of our time during the week. The Legion provides a good jump-start on this by requiring that three to four hours each week be set aside, which is only two percent of our time. Scripture says that when you tithe, God's blessing to you will be far greater than your generosity to Him. Therefore, as we give time to our Lord and His Mother, they bless us in many ways and we find even more time and more blessings in life. So we are encouraged to consider the tithing principle not only for finances but also for time. The aim is to spend ten percent of our time serving God through Catholic living and the active apostolate.

Brian Tracy, an internationally known speaker on time management presented the following research in one of his seminars: if you live to be sixty years old, you will spend twenty years of your life sleeping, seven years of your life in the bathroom, six years eating, five years waiting in line or sitting in traffic, four years cleaning house, three years at meetings, and one year looking for lost objects (I have figured out how to save this year of life -- pray to St. Anthony!), and eight months reading junk mail (I can also save you eight months by suggesting you throw junk mail directly into the "circular file" as soon as it comes in.). We should ask ourselves: out of those sixty years, how much time will we spend for God? We always seem to make time for whatever we feel is really important, be it playing golf, going to movies, watching TV. If we feel we do not have time to devote to apostolic works it is not because the time isn't there, but because the apostolate is not really a priority in our life. Legion of Mary membership solves this problem by supplying a ready-made system which helps us to become apostles by prioritizing our time and drawing on our untapped generosity.

The sixth benefit of legionary membership is the friendships that form and the Legion marriages that sometimes result. (For example, one Legion council in Cork, Ireland reported five marriages from one praesidium alone. It soon became the most popular praesidium in all of Ireland!) The Legion is a family, and that is why we call ourselves "brother" and "sister" at the meetings. During the course of the year the Legion offers many opportunities to celebrate our legionary friendship: the Annual General Reunion in December, the Acies Consecration
in the Spring, the Summer outdoor event, and the September praesidium function, not to mention the many times a cup of coffee is shared after a meeting or assignment. The Legion's main purpose is the holiness of the members; it increases the vertical relationship we have with God and the Blessed Mother, but it also enriches the horizontal relationship of friends we gain as we live the Legion way of life. It reminds me of a beautiful jeweled cross with the vertical bar, which is symbolic of our relationship with God, and the horizontal, symbolic of our relationships with others: brilliant and glowing with a true expression of Christian love.

The seventh positive by-product is that you will look ten years younger by being in the Legion! This can't be found in Canon Law but I believe it can be shown nonetheless. For example, Fr. Aedan McGrath, official Legion visitor to the Far East, is 92 years old, still active and looks to be about 75. I myself on occasion will be required to show proof of age when I order a glass of wine or a beer at a restaurant - and I'm 35! My own mom and dad look ten years younger than they are. Frank Duff was still riding his bicycle at the age of 91. (In fact, Frank Duff never drove a car except on one occasion when as a young man, he borrowed his brother's car and the engine exploded. He never drove a car again!) And as with Frank Duff, so it was with Edel Quinn, Alfie Lambe and others: the Legion kept them young in spirit and in body. I know some little old ladies in Philadelphia who, in their nineties, are still doing their Legion work of going door to door. The Legion continues to keep them young.

The eighth benefit of being in the Legion of Mary has its basis in the Letter of James, chapter 5, verse 19: "Brothers, if anyone among you should stray from the truth and someone bring him back, he should know that whoever brings back a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins." Therefore, if you help to bring back a sinner - for example, a fallen away Catholic, or bring a convert into the Catholic religion - if you are God's instrument to do that - the Bible says that you will cover a multitude of sins and save your own soul from death. The Legion, with its program of works which includes encouraging the lax and the lapsed to live again their Catholic Faith ensures its members of this future blessing.

The ninth positive result is based on Scripture and is found in the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 25, referring to the Final Judgment. Our Lord describes what it will be like to stand before Him and be judged. Jesus says: "When the Son of Man comes in His glory and all the angels with Him, He will sit upon His glorious throne and all the nations will be assembled before Him, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep on His right and the goats on His left. Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him and say, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison and visit you?' And the King will say to them in reply, 'Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for Me.' And then these will go off into everlasting life." Mother Teresa says that not only are people hungry for bread, they are hungry for the word of God and the Eucharist. People are not only thirsty for
something to drink, they are thirsting for God’s love. So, whatever we do for another person, Jesus assures us, we do it for Him.

The spiritual works of mercy - the Legion of Mary's primary program of works (such as encouraging people back to the sacraments, getting their children baptized, their marriages validated) will be even more important than the corporal works of mercy (feeding the hungry, clothing the naked) because the soul, unlike the body, is eternal and will last forever in either heaven or hell. What a great blessing it would be to hear Jesus say to us "Come, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world, for when I was sick in that nursing home you Legionaries visited Me. When I was in that prison, you came to see Me. When I was hungry for the Truth, you brought Me back to the Church. When I was thirsty for love, you came and comforted Me." I encourage you to meditate on this passage from Matthew chapter 25.

(In this connection there is a true story told about Henry Ford who, on a visit to Ireland (the place of his parent's birth) was approached one evening in a pub by some men who were in the process of building a new hospital; they requested a donation from him. Henry Ford agreed and promptly wrote them a check for $5,000. The next day's newspaper reported: American Industrialist, Henry Ford, Donates $50,000 toward Building of New Hospital! When Mr. Ford read this he understood immediately what these men were up to. The next night in the pub they approached him again, apologizing for the typographical error; they said it would be corrected in the next day's edition to state that it was only $5,000 that Mr. Ford donated! Wise to their scheme, Ford asked the men how much the hospital would actually cost. They replied, "$50,000". So Mr. Ford wrote out a brand new check for the $50,000 and said, "I will give this to you under one condition." They replied that, of course, anything he wanted they would do. Ford said, "Allow me to have a scripture quote carved above the main entrance of the hospital." They agreed. And so today, in the city of Cork, you will see above the front door of a certain hospital this scripture quotation from Matthew 25: "When I came among you as a stranger, you took me in.")

The tenth benefit of Legion membership is that after your death you will have more than six hundred thousand Masses celebrated for you every November, based on the Legion's worldwide estimate of six to ten million Active members, averaging ten members per praesidium. For every November each praesidium by rule must have a Mass said for all the deceased members of the Legion, both Active and Auxiliary. So, imagine sitting in Purgatory and along comes November 1 with six hundred thousand Masses being said for you. If you are not out of there soon, it's through no fault of the Legion of Mary!