



The Legion of Mary - Bishop Fulton Sheen

(Speech given at the Annual Council Officers' Meeting in Rochester, N.Y.)

“You are the only organization in the world today that ever anticipated the Vatican Council. The only one! You just go through your works and see how far ahead you are of the Council and with the Church. You are Pre-Council, Pro-Council, and Post-Council.

First you are a lay organization devoted to the apostolate, though the apostolate was reserved for the clergy. So you swept back about 20 centuries. Read over the list at the close of the Epistle to the Romans, members of the Legion of Mary, so that you will see that you have brought up to date the apostolate of the early Church. Also, in the Acts of the Apostles, it is in the third Act whereby the Church becomes established in a certain house; first a catechist works among the group and finally the Church itself. That is the first way you anticipated the Vatican Council.

The second and more important still is that you belong to the out-ministry. We priests belong to the in-ministry. That's not what God intended, but that's what happened. We wait for people to come to us and we build bigger rectories. We are failing because we are an in-ministry, waiting. You were from the beginning an out-ministry, commissioned to do the same sort of thing as Our Blessed Lord did -walking up and down alleys.

Third, you anticipated it even in relation to the Blessed Mother. This may seem strange but it's true. Your service is dedicated to building up the Church. It's not just merely the devotion to Our Lady, it's a devotion to Our Lady as the Mother of the Church. At the Council, we voted on the question of whether or not to give a new title to Our Lady. Our Lady has many as you know. It was decided not to give her another title. Two weeks later Pope Paul read his Encyclical Letter on the Blessed Mother as the "Mother of the Church". We gave her a new title. That's the Mother you love and who is your patroness.

You are a small group -- you have to be. Remember this! The Holy Spirit never works with the majority, only with minorities. You are the only present effective apostolate that we have in the world.

My good legionaries, this is what you are. From what I have told you, you know how much esteem and affection I have for you. I say you have anticipated the Vatican Council -- the future apostolate of the Church, and you are only at the beginning, just the beginning. Pray often to the Holy Spirit that your zeal will spread and that others will have the courage to do it. I consider it an honor, really an honor, to be in the midst of you. Just as sometimes oil gets outside of a bottle by osmosis, so too, by being near you, I hope to get some of your spirit”.