

Thy Kingdom Come!

Rome, September 15, 2024
Our Lady of Sorrows

To the Legionaries of Christ

Dear Fathers and Brothers in Christ,

I hope you are enjoying the Lord's grace in your different apostolates and activities. Each year since 2021, on this feast of our heavenly patroness, I have written you letters addressing specific topics. My intention has been to be present among you at the beginning of the academic year, sharing some reflections about topics that are proper to us as Legionaries, such as our transformation into new men, our identification as apostles according to Christ's Heart, and our *raison d'être* as Legionaries. This year I am writing to you about our role and mission within Regnum Christi, based on the experience of the General Convention held last May.

A seed that flourishes, a dream that comes true

Since 2018, the Congregation of the Legionaries of Christ has been part of the Regnum Christi Federation, together with the Lay Consecrated Men and the Consecrated Women of Regnum Christi—a Federation to which young people, adults, diocesan priests, and others associate. Although this canonical configuration is something new, we can see it as merely the current stage of a reality that started as a seed more than eighty years ago. Before the consecrated branches existed, the first Legionaries dreamed of an “army” of lay people—both consecrated and not—who would work side by side with them to establish the Kingdom of Christ in society. This dream is now a reality. Number 10 of the *Statutes* speaks about the “interior urging in our hearts that impels us to passionate self-giving in order to make his Kingdom present,” of the importance of “accepting that following Christ includes spiritual combat,” and of “undertaking with a magnanimous, enthusiastic, and creative heart the actions that make the Kingdom present in greater depth and extent.”

Today, Regnum Christi is composed of communities of active apostles, scattered throughout the world, directing mature apostolates and undertaking new ones.

Each one contributes his own gifts, in collaboration with others

When I was ordained a priest in 2001, my assignment was on the East Coast of the United States. My main mission was to raise funds to help sustain our formation centers in Cheshire, Thornwood, and Rome. My job was simple: seek out generous people who were interested in helping us. I performed my mission mainly in cities where Regnum Christi was not fully developed, such as Philadelphia and Miami. As I got to know people, those who most identified with the Legion's mission always wanted something more: They wanted to get involved in the mission personally; they wanted to be formed; they wanted what Regnum Christi could give them. But Regnum Christi was a fledgling reality in their cities, and I was newly ordained.

As a young priest, I had a Legionary mentor who was the director of a well-established Regnum Christi section. He guided me in my first steps. He helped me understand how Regnum Christi sections worked. He even sent his best formators to help in the retreats and spiritual exercises we offered in an effort to make Regnum Christi better known. After a while, the Consecrated Women arrived in the region to work with the adult women and girls. And, thanks to this team spirit, I was able to witness the miraculous growth of Regnum Christi.

All this came about because of the collaboration of several priests and well-formed lay people who came together to share the treasure of our charism. Many of you have also had the same experience, at least in its essential aspects: you found people who carried a restless desire to evangelize in their hearts; you sought to fan that flame into a crackling fire; and you connected them with others who experience the same restlessness and desire, building a community and evangelizing. This is what Regnum Christi is in many parts of the world. A seed that grows and multiplies, not thanks to the work of a single person, but as the fruit of collaboration and evangelizing communion among many.

The specific mission of Legionaries within Regnum Christi

As Legionaries, we form part of this spiritual family, made up of members of different vocations, with whom we share certain aspects of spirituality and mission. We are called to serve and support the other members with our ministry, our religious identity, and our very being as apostles. This service entails a call to live numerous virtues with magnanimity, beginning with charity and communion, and including all the virtues required for good teamwork in the localities.

Although each Legionary contributes his own personality and talents, by the very fact of being a Legionary he also offers something that a member of other branches will not. Our specific contribution is outlined both in our *Constitutions*, particularly numbers 1 to 4, and in the *Statutes of the Regnum Christi Federation*. In this sense, *Statutes* no. 5 is particularly relevant:

The Legionaries of Christ, by their religious consecration, contribute the testimony of their self-giving to Jesus Christ and their complete availability for the fulfillment of the common mission. By their condition as priests, they make present Christ the Priest and Good Shepherd through preaching, administering the sacraments and spiritual direction. In communion with all, they collaborate in the integral formation, direction, and apostolic projection of the associated lay faithful, promoting the fullness of their baptismal vocation and Christian leadership; and they establish institutions and initiate actions that can most contribute, in depth and in extent, to building up the Kingdom of Christ in society.

These numbers of the *Constitutions* and the *Statutes* indicate that we have a unique identity as religious priests who form part of Regnum Christi. This identity defines who we are and determines how we live the mission entrusted to us, a mission that we share with other vocations.

Some implications and recommendations for our Legionary life

This reality, that we Legionaries of Christ form part of Regnum Christi with the particular mission of “making Christ the Priest and Good Shepherd present,” has certain implications for our Legionary life.

- 1. Testimony of self-giving to Christ as a religious—a sign of the life to come*

The first characteristic that *Statutes* no. 5 identifies as our contribution is “the testimony of their self-giving to Jesus Christ” that we give precisely “by [our] religious consecration.” That is to say, the living of the

evangelical counsels, according to a rule of life, gives eloquent witness of theological hope to the other members of Regnum Christi. Our radical way of life—living like Jesus Christ, chaste, poor, and obedient—demonstrates a freedom of spirit by placing all our trust in God and ordering the desires of our hearts toward that which is above. By consecrating ourselves “totally, definitively, and exclusively to the one, supreme love of Christ” (CLC 27, 1.º) in chastity, we offer a sign of the future life in which men and women “neither marry nor are given in marriage but are like the angels in heaven” (Mt 22:30). By this consecration we direct our hearts towards spiritual goods and the treasures of heaven, placing ourselves in God’s providential hands (see CLC 19, 1.º), motivating others to detach themselves from fleeting things and to set their hearts on that which that will last. By this consecration, we submit our will to God’s will through legitimate superiors who “stand in the place of God when they command according to these *Constitutions*” (CLC 31, 2.º).

We should not underestimate the effect that the witness of a life totally dedicated to Christ has on others. For the fulfillment of the mission, the *Constitutions* themselves give this witness priority over the apostolate (see CLC 2 § 2 º2.). Far from separating a religious from the daily life of the people he accompanies, his testimony makes him a reference point and a source of light that guides their journey. Imitation is the primary way by which man learns how to live. We learned to speak by imitating what we heard. We learned to play by watching others play. We learned how to behave by watching others interact with their environment. Man learns his values by the culture around him. On the one hand, therefore, through their witness, consecrated men and women embody the values of the culture of the Kingdom of Christ and put them on display. On the other, they make evident the differences between the culture of the City of God and that of the city of men, like a stroke of white paint on a black wall. It is not enough to preach the values of the Kingdom; we must live them ourselves in order to become authentic examples.

This will only happen when we live our consecration in an authentic way. That is why the General Chapter of 2020 chose authenticity as one of the three values for the following six years. If we do not live our consecration authentically, instead of beaming like a lighthouse in the

darkness, we will disappear like a ship lost in the fog. This is a particular risk for us because of the environments in which we exercise our apostolate.

That is why we must always be attentive to the concessions we allow ourselves. We could say that there are certain warning signs. For example, our mind may present us with justifications such as: “just be normal,” “everyone does it,” “it’s not a sin,” “where is it written that it’s not allowed,” “that’s where the leaders are,” “what’s the big deal,” etc. A religious life built on this way of thinking and acting can become mired in a mediocre consecrated life that lacks the strength to attract others to convert and to imitate Jesus Christ.

We give edifying witness when we opt for greater consistency with our style of consecrated life. “Thank you for the invitation, but my community has Eucharistic hour at that time”; “I haven’t watched that TV series because I think it would rob me of interior peace”; “I’d love to go to the mountains with you, but we’ll be getting some R&R in community, which is important for us.” With this way of being and living, we say to people: I belong to God, and I need to nourish my soul with his presence and his grace in order to best serve you.

2. Leadership after the example of Jesus Christ, Priest and Good Shepherd

The second characteristic that *Statutes* no. 5 points to as part of our particular contribution is the following: “By their condition as priests, they make present Christ the Priest and Good Shepherd.” Implicit in the identity of priest and shepherd is the responsibility of exercising leadership. The shepherd protects his flock and leads them to greener pastures. “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (*Jn* 10:11). We must be aware of our leadership role within *Regnum Christi*. Here I am not referring to positions of authority or directive roles within government structures; I am referring to the moral and spiritual ascendancy we exercise by living as we are called to live. When we live our identity according to our *Constitutions*, which is how the Legionary lives the Gospel, we necessarily bring to the spiritual family our contribution as imitators of Jesus Christ, Priest and Good

Shepherd, who inspires, encourages, and provides vision to the rest of the members.

Therefore, Fathers and Brothers, we must keep in mind that the specific mission of the Legionary is to form others in the image and likeness of Jesus Christ. Certainly, one can hold positions of authority, but this does not necessarily make one effective in shaping the future of a particular apostolate. People with natural leadership qualities, whether they hold office or not, will exert influence in the environment in which they find themselves. Legionaries, if we are what we are meant to be, will exercise leadership with or without positions of authority.

A chaplain, for example, if he is authentic in his vocation, can be to a school what the soul is to the body; he can give it life, guiding both teachers and students to keep their attention on the highest ideals that the educational institution seeks to instill, helping them not to limit their focus only to their immediate academic discipline. He can shape the consciences of board members, parents, teachers, students, faculty, and staff. His presence and work can be transformative for the entire institution. While some Legionaries will be chosen for leadership positions, we are all called to exercise leadership wherever we are.

We cannot forget that part of a Legionary's mission is also to "establish institutions and initiate actions that can most contribute, in depth and in extent, to building up the Kingdom of Christ in society" (*EFRC*, 5). This is not out of a desire to be seen, or for power, or for merely human presence. Rather, it is due to our certainty that God calls us to this style of mission. This is the spirit we have always lived. *Christus Vita Vestra* describes it this way:

A Legionary has a magnanimous and fighting heart. He gives himself with passion, desires to do more, wants to go farther. Therefore, attentive to the signs of the times, "making the most of the opportunity" (Eph 5:16), he works with zeal and creativity. He seeks out new paths, advancing the mission on both the pastoral and intellectual frontiers of the Church, aware that every day of fatigue for the Kingdom is a precious gift from God that will never return, and that he gives us time to gain eternity. We call this attitude "militancy" (CVV 112).

In summary: our mission comes to life when we exercise leadership on a daily basis in every interaction and with each person we accompany. It comes to life when we act according to our identity, consistent with our values, and with a spirit of service and dedication, regardless of the position of authority we may or may not hold. In this way, we can make our own the priorities of the recent General Convention, which seek to face the challenges today's world presents, a point that I will address below.

3. A guiding principle for living the priorities of the General Convention and facing today's cultural challenge

The General Convention gave Regnum Christi three priorities: (1) to promote a culture of vocation, (2) to assume the commitment to be and to form communities of apostles that go out into the world on mission, and (3) to strengthen our pastoral care for marriage and family.

Within this framework, I have also contemplated today's cultural context: gender ideologies, attacks on the concept of fatherhood, and the false understanding of men's role in society.

I believe that the Legion, within Regnum Christi, has an opportunity to address the three priorities in order to respond to this cultural challenge. Because we are men, and because we are religious, we have a particular opportunity in our work with lay men. We know that men, living their vocation in their families and in society, not in opposition to women, but in complementarity, are key to making the three priorities of the Convention come alive. So, by focusing on or giving an emphasis to our work with men, we can offer a great service to the Church. We provide this service through the Regnum Christi men, the dads of the students in our educational institutions, the ECYD boys, the young men in the Regnum Christi sections, and the men who participate in any of our apostolic work.

Therefore, I would like to give all Legionaries a guiding principle to keep in mind: as a Congregation, we can offer the Church and Regnum Christi a particular service in the formation and accompaniment of men.

One of the most beautiful fruits that God grants us in our work with men, and in the living of our identity, are vocations to the Legion and to the Consecrated Lay Men. The vocations crisis that the Church is experiencing is, in a certain way, also a crisis of the youth. Young men struggle to find role models who are God-centered, authentic, and selfless, in whom they can see embodied the ideals found in the Gospel of radical consecration. Thus, promoting vocations, as the task of each Legionary, is an invitation to live our religious life with such fullness that God may do with us as he has done with all authentic religious saints of the Church: inspire self-giving to God.

When I visited the Legionaries in Venezuela last July, they told me about an apostolate that is having great success in the men's sections. It is called the *Rosario de señores* (Men's Rosary), and they meet once a week. It is something simple, but this type of activity is also taking place in other territories. Men want their own spaces to pray, to share challenges and difficulties in life, to do spiritual things among other men. More and more initiatives of Legionaries around the world are cropping up to respond to this need.

Some examples come to mind: an initiative called *Braveheart*, run by a father and some Regnum Christi men in the Territory of Northern Mexico; Fathers in Poland carrying out missions in Albania for men only; in the United States an apostolate called *Reset*, meant to help young men put their lives in order, just began. I know there are many other initiatives and apostolates I am not mentioning here, but my point is that these initiatives are responding to a growing need. They are new and creative. They are what society and the Church need now.

I conclude with the example of a friend of Saint John Paul II who passed away a few months ago. She was also a friend of several Legionaries. Her name was Wanda Póltawska, and she was a doctor. Because of what she learned from her relationship with Saint John Paul II, every time she spoke to Legionaries, she encouraged them to dedicate themselves to forming groups of men and not getting distracted by other things. She always stressed the importance of formation in masculinity for the integral development of men and the good of society. For men to be able to deal with the crisis of masculinity in contemporary society, she would say, it is essential that they themselves have a well-formed

masculinity, based on values such as responsibility, respect, and willingness to sacrifice. She considered that we had the right charism for forming men. She stressed that by forming them we bring about change in society and in the family from within. This is a concrete way for us to address the third priority of the General Convention: *strengthen our pastoral care for marriage and family*.

In summary, as men of the Kingdom, inspired by Saint Paul the Apostle, we must bear witness as religious of our love for God, exercise the moral and spiritual leadership that we have when we live out our identity as imitators of Jesus, Priest and Good Shepherd, and take the appropriate actions to respond to the challenges of today's culture through the evangelization of the family, and particularly of men.

I sincerely thank you all for your self-giving and constant efforts, trusting that Our Lady of Sorrows will continue to help us build the Kingdom of Christ in the hearts of men and in society.

I remain affectionately yours in Christ and the Legion,