

Inside the Legion of Mary – On Legionary Things

The Miraculous Medal

By Father Francis J. Peffley

A Marian Catechism

The miraculous medal has been part of the history of the Legion since the very beginning. At the first praesidium meeting a statue had been placed on the altar – the same model seen today: Mary as Mediatrix of all Graces, called The Immaculate Conception; it is the same image impressed on the miraculous medal. The prayer on the face of the medal – *O Mary conceived without sin, Pray for us who have recourse to thee* – was prayed as part of that first meeting as well as at every meeting since, and whenever the Catena is said. The miraculous medal became so important a sacramental in the Legion that it eventually was made part of its official standard, the Vexillum. I think it is most necessary for legionaries to learn its history but also to realize it is a Marian Catechism, a great means of explaining the Catholic Faith to others.

Its original name was The Medal of the Immaculate Conception, but because it brought about so many conversions, returns to the sacraments, healings and miracles, it became known by its nickname: The Miraculous Medal. When studying the medal, begin with the date 1830, the year Our Lady appeared to St. Catherine Laboure in the Daughters of Charity Mother house at Rue De Bac in Paris. It was November 27, 1830, when St. Catherine saw, above the altar in the chapel, the vision of Our Lady just as she is imaged on the medal: her arms open, her hands radiating graces and her foot crushing the serpent. Then the vision reversed itself, displaying the back side of the medal.

The front of the medal has been called the *joyful* side because it shows Mary as the Immaculate Conception, denoting the great joy that she was conceived without original sin and that, as the New Eve, is powerful in the crushing of evil. It also depicts Our Lady as the Mother of all mankind, her welcoming arms open, reaching out to her children and distributing God's grace to the world. So when legionaries and others wear the medal they are placing themselves under Mary's special protection and patronage. The *O Mary conceived without sin* prayer, encircling the edge of the medal, turns the wearers into *living* miraculous medals, into a continuous prayer, a constant request for Our Lady's intercession.

The back of the medal is called *sorrowful* for several reasons. First of all, in the very center is found the cross, recalling the fact that Jesus Christ is the center of our spiritual life; it represents Good Friday, his passion and death, and is a reminder that the cross is a necessary part of the Christian life. The M beneath the cross represents Mary as the co-redemptrix, the predicted Woman, who

stood and suffered in compassion at the foot of the cross; the bar connecting the M to the cross indicates the inseparability of Christ and Mary, the new Adam and the new Eve. The sorrowful theme is carried out by the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of Mary. The Sacred Heart is ringed with thorns, the Immaculate Heart is pierced with a sword. The thorns recall the crowned, pierced head of Christ; the sword – the sword of sorrow in Simeon’s prediction to Mary, which culminated with the soldier’s thrust into the side of her Son. Lastly there is seen the oval of twelve stars, connoting a number of things. If the person to whom the medal is offered is Jewish, reference can be made to the twelve tribes of Israel, to Mary as being part of one of those tribes, and a Jewish mother. To a Christian the reference would be to the twelve Apostles and to Chapter 12 of the book of Revelation, where the “Woman” has a crown of twelve stars about her head.

The handbook suggests that the miraculous medal is like ammunition, and Maximilian Kolbe called them his “bullets”, in the very real warfare against evil. All legionaries should be armed with this weapon which the handbook says is filled with a double grace, considering its place in the Legion system and the reputation it has for being a channel of miraculous power. It must be kept in mind what a privilege it is to have access to this special sacramental; it is not some human artist’s rendition but is *Our Lady’s own creation right out of Heaven*, and therefore holds much meaning and many miracles for all mankind.