



***A Letter from the Spiritual Director of the  
Ottawa Regia of the Legion of Mary***

Dear Members of the Ottawa *Regia* of the Legion of Mary,

I am writing you this letter to address a very serious issue and to offer you some insights as your spiritual director. I am sure that most of you are aware of the crisis facing the Church today, one that has been brought into the public eye by recent reports and investigations, largely by the secular media and authorities. I am speaking, of course, of the recent evidence concerning sexual misconduct and the abuse of power by certain members of the Catholic hierarchy. A most disconcerting fact is that these reports are not individual and isolated, but rather seem to be becoming more and more interconnected. As Legionaries of Mary, a large part of our mission consists in bringing souls to Christ through the Blessed Virgin. This involves bringing souls to the Catholic Faith and to the Church founded by Jesus Christ. But I am sure that, for many of you, as for many faithful Catholics (both clergy and laity) throughout the world, in light of the recent reports, it is easy to get dejected and even, if we are not careful, to lose faith in the divine origin and mission of the Catholic Church.

Our Faith is founded on Jesus Christ, and on no other single human authority or figure: no Priest, no Bishop, no Cardinal, no Pope. However, as faithful Catholics, we know that Christ entrusts His mission of salvation to His Church, and so we honour and look up to those who are the representatives of Christ in the Church founded by Our Lord. We Legionaries of Mary honour Priests and Bishops because of our great love for Jesus. We know that Jesus is made present in His Church through the Sacramental ministry of His ordained ministers. This is why, when some of those ministers fall short of the life that we rightly expect them to uphold, we can easily be tempted to fall into an excessive sadness and even, if we are not careful, into despair.

Sorrow in regard to the sins and shortcomings of members of the Catholic clergy is warranted. In fact, there would be something wrong if we did not feel sorrow and hurt. When the ones we look up to and admire because they are said to be doing the work of God fall into grave sin and become causes of scandal, we are rightfully angry and confounded, sometimes not knowing how to respond or what to do.

As members of the Legion of Mary, we are Mary's Army. We are called to fight for the Faith and to defend the Catholic Church as the Bride of Christ. But we are certainly not called to defend

certain behaviours (even when they are performed by members of the Catholic hierarchy) that are clearly contrary to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

One of my greatest sorrows that I feel in regard to the current situation in the Church is that the sins of some in places of high authority within the Church compromise the trust and confidence that many once had in the Church founded by Jesus. The mission of the Church today is made much more difficult because of the moral failings of visible and prominent members of the hierarchy. It is important that we refrain, however, from the over-generalizations often presented in the mainstream secular media. Just because some members of the hierarchy and of the clergy are unfaithful, it does not mean that all are, or that the Church as an institution itself is corrupt.

In Catholic theology, there is a very important principle that must be upheld. There is a difference between the sinfulness of individual members of the Church and the sinless character of the Church herself. The Catholic Church is the Mystical Body of Christ and the Bride of Christ. She is One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic, as we profess in the Creed every Sunday. The Church as such is immaculate and spotless: an image of the Immaculate Virgin, whom we honour in a special way in the Legion of Mary. But the sinless Church founded by Jesus is not composed of sinless members. In the Church there are both Saints and sinners. The holiness of the Saints, over the centuries, has lifted up and glorified the Church; but similarly, the vices and moral failings of sinners within the Church have dragged her down and tarnished her image in the world.

When Pope John Paul II came to Toronto for the World Youth Day in 2002, the clergy sexual abuse scandals were just coming to the forefront in the world's media, especially in the United States. In the address that the Holy Father gave at Downsview Park at the closing Mass of the World Youth Day, the Pope said the following to the youth who were gathered in attendance:

If you love Jesus, love the Church! Do not be discouraged by the sins and failings of some of her members. The harm done by some Priests and religious to the young and vulnerable fills us all with a deep sense of sadness and shame. But think of the vast majority of dedicated and generous Priests and religious whose only wish is to serve and do good! There are many Priests, seminarians and consecrated persons here today; be close to them and support them! And if, in the depths of your hearts, you feel the same call to the Priesthood or consecrated life, do not be afraid to follow Christ on the royal road of the Cross! At difficult moments in the Church's life, the pursuit of holiness becomes even more urgent. And holiness is not a question of age; it is a matter of living in the Holy Spirit.

These words from Pope John Paul II were meant to encourage the young people in the Church to distinguish between the failings and sins of some clergy and religious, on the one hand, and the holiness of the Church, on the other. The Holy Father reminded us that holiness is the only

adequate response to sin. Our personal holiness is the best way to combat the infidelities and sinfulness of others.

The same remains true today, dear Legionaries of Mary. God is purifying the Church in our times, and the purification can be very painful for us to witness. But it is also a call to us to move forward on the path of sanctity: to be faithful, as it were, for those who are unfaithful. One form of Catholic spirituality that, sadly, has been much forgotten in the past few decades is what the Church calls *reparation*. To *make reparation* means to “repair” the damage caused by sin, to repair the hurt that sin causes against God, through the offering of our faithfulness and love. Reparation means that we must offer to Jesus and Mary our love and our fidelity to make amends for those who do not love God or who are unfaithful to God. Reparation could involve prayer, adoration, acts of faith, hope, and charity; it could involve penances such as fasting or rising in the night to pray (vigils); it could involve many other sacrifices — in fact, any sacrifice that we offer up to God through which we say to Him, “O, Lord, I am sorry for the offences against You caused by sin. Accept my sacrifice as my desire to make amends for sin. Receive my love in exchange for the hatred of others; receive my faithfulness in exchange for the infidelities of others; receive the joy that my offering gives to You in exchange for the sorrows inflicted upon Your Sacred Heart by the sins of many.”

Such a prayer, dear Legionaries of Mary, is a wonderful way of living out our personal call to holiness and of making amends and reparation for sin. We give to Jesus, through the hands of Immaculate Mary and through the hands of the Church (the Immaculate Bride of Christ) our faith, our hope, and our love. Surely Our Blessed Mother must have made many acts of reparation for sin to Jesus, her Son, especially during the time of His bitter Passion.

Holy Mother Church today is going through a passion of her own. She must imitate Jesus and suffer with Him. But that suffering should not be a source of discouragement and despair; instead, it should fill us with the virtue of hope.

Yesterday, on September 14, the Church celebrated the feast day of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. On this feast, we were reminded through the readings and prayers at Mass and in the Divine Office that the Cross is not just a mystery of suffering and pain; the Cross is also (and perhaps even foremost) a mystery of love. The Church speaks about the Glorious Cross, the Victorious Cross, because it is there on the Cross that the price of our redemption was won.

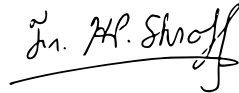
I wish to encourage you all, dear Legionaries of Mary and members of the Ottawa *Regia*, to avoid the temptation of discouragement and despair in regard to the terrible crisis that is shaking our Church today. Instead, I invite you to re-read and meditate on those words of Pope St. John Paul II that I quoted above. *If you love Jesus, love the Church*. Pray for Holy Mother Church. Pray to Our Blessed Mother, the Mother of the Church, and to good St. Joseph, the patron saint of the universal Catholic Church. Offer your prayers, your fidelity, and your love to

Jesus through Mary. This is what, I believe, we are all called to do during these difficult times, we who are members of Mary's spiritual army.

Finally, I would like to invite all Legionaries to read and meditate upon Chapter 9 of the *Handbook of the Legion of Mary*: "The Legionary and the Mystical Body of Christ." In particular, I invite you to read carefully section 3 ("Suffering in the Mystical Body"). I am sure that you will find it very encouraging and spiritually enriching during these difficult times that Holy Mother Church is passing through.

I thank you for your prayers and for all that you do in Our Lady's Army. Your faithfulness and charity surely bring many graces to your parishes in particular and to the Catholic Church as a whole. May Our Lady reward you abundantly, and may we all continue to advance on the path of holiness as we grow in our knowledge and love of Jesus Christ, Our Saviour and Our Lord.

Written in Ottawa, on this 15th day of September, the Feast of Our Lady of Sorrows,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Fr. Hezuk Shroff". The signature is written in black ink and is underlined with a single horizontal stroke.

Fr. Hezuk Shroff  
Spiritual Director of the Ottawa *Regia*