

THE CATENA

By Rev. Francis Lendacky

Every Legionary, Active and Auxiliary, is required to recite the Catena Legionis every day. The recitation of the Catena may very well be regarded as the battle cry of the Legion of Mary in its warfare against the Evil One. Somewhere on the face of this planet, the Catena is recited at almost every hour.. It interlocks all the active and auxiliary members from the many nations into a global community. It assembles in battle array all the legionary soldiers who are engaged actively in the spiritual warfare. And it reinforces the rampart of prayer to protect the Faithful within and to withstand the enemy without.

Reflecting on the Catena in the present tense, we can readily consider it to be the spiritual chain which binds each Legionary to Mary, and each and every Legionary in Mary. But considering the various components of the Catena Legionis, we need to ponder the past, and to come to a fuller appreciation of the Catena, which is the one and only prayer which every Legionary is obliged to recite daily.

The Catena is composed of an antiphon, borrowed from the 6th chapter of the inspired Old Testament book, The Song of Songs. It includes Mary's song of Praise, a Verse and Response found in the liturgy of the Immaculate Conception. And it concludes with an oration honoring Mary, Mediatrix of All Graces, Mother of God and Mother of all men. The Catena is the prayer paradigm reflecting the Legionary Devotion to Mary, which every Legionary is obliged to foster in his legionary life.

The very heart of the Catena is the Magnificat, that inspired canticle whose prophetic lyrics filled the house of Zechariah and Elizabeth at the Visitation. Therein two favored women greeted each other, and the sons they carried in their wombs recognized each other. The unborn Lamb of God assigned the Jordan Baptizer to his Precursor vocation. Mary burst into Her canticle of exceptional beauty, as Canon Ripley describes it, which can be considered not an emotional outburst of joy, but a glorious aria announcing the dawn of salvation. The Magnificat brings together the major themes of Old Testament piety. This canticle, imbued with the faith and hope of Israel--and as recorded by humanity's holiest person--has become the Church's song of predilection for praising the Lord's salvific intervention toward the poor and the lowly.

When the Legionary recalls the first time the Magnificat was sung, he recalls the scene of the Visitation where Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth. The episode takes place in the home of Zechariah and Elizabeth. One spiritual writer reminds us that the home of the aged priest and the sterile wife of the priest had endured a childless cradle for their entire wedded life, but that Elizabeth had at last been blessed by the God who does impossible things. Zechariah, whose priestly voice had been muted,

and Elizabeth, whose womb was swelling with child, awaited the son whose name and vocation would remain unitedly unique for all time.

The singular eloquence of the Magnificat finds its inspiration in the event Mary celebrates; namely, the Incarnation of the Son of God. The same spiritual writer, alluded to above, reminds us of the altogether priestly character of the persons involved in the Visitation. Both Mary and Elizabeth were descendants of priestly tribes; the son of Elizabeth was the offspring of the priest, Zechariah; the Son of Mary would be recognized as the Eternal High Priest sent from the Father on High to fulfill the promise made to Abraham of old and to bring about the fall of the reign of Darkness. The Magnificat was chanted within the context of priestly tradition, service, and sacrifice. The Catena can remind all the Legionaries of the priestly character of the Christian vocation.

But the Catena can also remind us of the future. When the Legionary recites the Catena every day, he is part and parcel of the generations who are calling Mary blessed. He aligns himself with the poor and the lowly who will conquer the world. And he may perhaps -be rehearsing the melody which not only signaled the beginning of the conquest of the condemned Serpent, but will finalize the victory of the King of Kings and the Queen of Heaven and earth.

The daily recitation of the Catena is no mere obligation of prayer for the Legionary. In repeating privately the Gospel canticle placed on the lips of our Queen and Mother, the Legionary not only conjoins himself with the present enlistment of Legionaries, but also commemorates the Legionaries of the past-among whom are Brother Duff, Sister Edel Quinn, Brother Alphie Lamb, and thousands of others--who set the pace for us in our membership. When the Legionary recites the Catena, he also commits himself to follow obediently the Mary of the Visitation, who sang so jubilantly as She carried the Lord and Master in her womb, and could not wait to serve Him to others.

The recitation of the Catena, whether in the Praesidium or in the Council, ought to resemble the precise chanting of a hymn by an enormous well-trained chorus. When recited with others in assembly, the Catena should resemble the cadence count of an army in measured stride with the Queen of the Legion. The precise and measured recitation of the Catena in union with Our Queen and Mother allows Her loyal Legionaries to praise God in a way no other human person ever prayed to the Triune God.

The Legionary should not be content merely to sing Mary's song but should be eager to serve Her Son as She does. And the recitation of the Catena is meant to remind us daily about our Legionary devotion and apostolate.