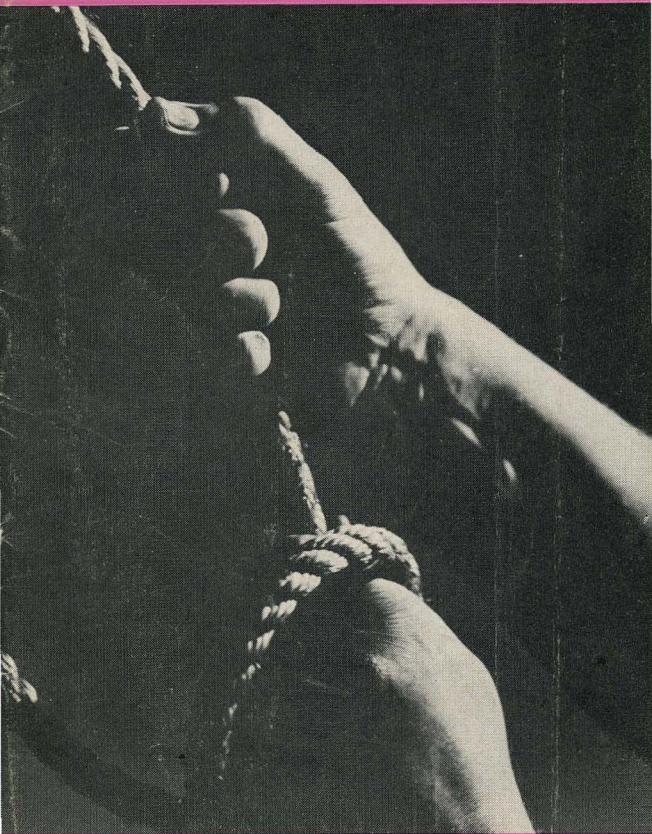


God's Quarterm... Quartermasters

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ADU 1125



GOD'S
QUARTERMASTERS



by

DEMETRIUS MANOUSOS
O.F.M.CAP.

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TURNING the corner of the cloister I saw old Brother Giles sitting by the forsythia bushes. The May breeze played with his white beard and the golden glory of the forsythia set a halo about him. He smiled at me, and his eyes sparkled.

"How's the old warrior?" I asked banteringly.

I did not get the chuckle I expected. Instead he answered seriously, "Not warrior, Father, — *soldier*."

"Soldier?" I laughed. "But warrior sounds more venerable."

"That doesn't make any difference, Father. I *am* a soldier and I'm proud of it."

His earnestness got me off guard. Evidently there was something serious on his mind. I must have looked puzzled, for he suddenly chuckled and asked me to sit down a while.

"Let me tell you what I mean," he began. "Father Provincial has asked us to begin a novena for vocations, hasn't he? And I'm thinking he wants lay-brother vocations more than anything else."

I did not see what this had to do with his being a soldier, but it certainly was true. We do need lay-brothers. In fact the whole nation needs lay-brothers. There is a much lower percentage of lay-brother vocations in the United States than there is of vocations to the priesthood or sisterhood, and the percentage of all vocations is nowhere near what it should be.

"Well, Father," and Brother Giles dug his cane into the soft earth, "I think that if more young fellows would know that I'm a soldier we'd get more candidates."

Now I *was* puzzled, and Brother Giles enjoyed it. "Here's what I mean," he said. "Young America today isn't what it used

to be. The past has been more or less chopped off in the last twenty years. First it was the depression and then the war. It's kind of turned everything upside down. Even Catholics don't look at religious life the way they used to. I'm not saying that people are worse than they used to be; in fact, I think in a lot of ways they're better. But their attitude has changed.

"When I was a youngster, Father, people looked at themselves first and the rest of the world afterwards. Today it's the other way round. When I was a novice men became religious because they saw that the place of a religious in the Mystical Body was the best place to save their souls. Today men will become religious only if they see that religious life is the best place to help the Mystical Body."

"You mean people aren't as selfish as they used to be?"

"No, I don't. It's got nothing to do with selfishness. It's just a different point of view."

I broke a twig of forsythia and began to

pluck the bright yellow petals, "But what's this point of view got to do with you're being a soldier?"

"Plenty, Father. A soldier's life can be very good for a man, but men become soldiers first to help their country and only secondarily to help themselves. If we advertise us religious as soldiers of Christ, men will be attracted who think first of helping the Mystical Body and only secondarily of helping themselves."

"So religious are soldiers in the Mystical Body — soldiers for Christ. That's not exactly a new idea, Brother."

"I know it, Father. It goes all the way back to Saint Paul. But he didn't have the opportunity to stress it that we have. It's only in the last half century that the world has learned what total war is. Nowadays everybody is in the war. Even women and children play a decisive part on the home front. But the Church has always had total war. Every Christian is a soldier for Christ. Even children have to fight against the powers of evil.

"Now just as there are positions of dif-

ferent importance in the total war of a nation, so there are different positions in the total war of the Church. Christ is the Commander-in-chief, just like the president. He governs the home front directly. Heaven is the home front, where the saints provide the spiritual ammunition with which we do the fighting. Purgatory is the military hospital where wounded soldiers get fixed up for their work on the home front. Like the president, Christ has a delegate on the fighting front. The Pope is the commander-in-chief in the field.”

I had never thought of the Church in that way. Brother saw my interest and continued.

“Then there are the cardinals who make up the Pope’s council of war, and the bishops who are generals of different sections of the army.

“The army, of course, has a multitude of divisions. The regulars are usually officered by the secular clergy — commissioned officers called pastors, and the non-commissioned officers, their assistants. The

ranks are filled by the millions of Catholic lay people throughout the world. We religious are the crack-troops, specially trained for the hardest work, and officered by our superiors.

"In the army there are all kinds of occupations. Writers like you, Father, belong to the artillery; you fire long range guns against the enemy. Preachers are bombardiers trying to raze the ramparts the devil has raised in the hearts of men. Missionaries are commandoes invading enemy territory. The medical corps works in the confessional, and every Christian has to fight at some time or other with the rifle of good works, the machine gun of good example, hand grenades of apostolic speech, and of course in hand to hand combat with his own temptations."

"That just about covers everything."

"Oh no, I haven't even mentioned the point I'm after. We brothers, Father, are God's quartermasters. That's a fact most people don't think of. If they did, we'd have more vocations.

"You see, a quartermaster is a soldier

just as much as anybody else in the army, and a very, very important soldier. His work isn't so glamorous as that of some of the other corps, but it's often more vital. An army can't fight without ammunition, and it can't live without food. The quartermaster supplies both."

"I see what you mean. Lay-brothers do the cooking, take care of the clothes, cultivate the garden, and do all the other material things necessary to keep us priests going. In that way they're quartermasters keeping the army on its feet."

Brother looked at me disapprovingly. "You've missed the biggest point," he said. "Remember, a quartermaster doesn't only take care of the food and clothing of the army. He also supplies the ammunition. And that's the most important part of our duties as God's quartermasters. We supply a big part of the ammunition for Christ's army."

"Meaning?"

"Prayer, Father, prayer is our big job."

We cook and we sew and we work in the garden — and we wouldn't be good quartermasters if we didn't do a good job of these things — but our biggest job is producing ammunition. We can work only part of the day, but we can produce ammunition all the time. That's the grand part of a lay-brother's life, Father, — he can pray practically all the time."

"I see—quartermasters always on duty."

"That's it. You don't know how much it means to one, specially when he's an old codger like me. I'm not much good for work any more, Father. I couldn't stand the heat of the kitchen stove; my lumbago won't let me work in the garden; my eyes are no longer good enough for sewing. But am I useless? Do I have to be put on a pension? Nothing doing! I'm still turning out ammunition, and — God be praised — I've more time for it.

"I said before that as a writer you belong to the artillery, Father. Well, what good would it be if you fired all kinds of shells and none of them exploded? There's only one thing that can make your writ-

ing effective, Father, and that's the grace of God. It's prayer that supplies the grace of God. I called the preachers bombardiers. All their fine sermons would fall on enemy installations like so many duds if it wasn't for prayers supplying the explosives. Can you blame me for being proud of my position in God's army? God's quartermasters mean a lot in the big fight."

"So that's the idea you think would help us get more vocations?"

"That's it, Father. Of course, you don't have to be a professional quartermaster to help supply ammunition. Everybody prays in the Church, just as everybody gives alms to help with the material side of the quartermaster's duties.

"But we lay-brothers are the specialists. We give all our time to the duties of quartermasters, and we get a special training just for that work. In the novitiate we learn how to work and, what's more important, how to pray. So what I'd tell a young man who was wondering whether he should become a lay-brother is that he

can do a lot of good for the army by prayers and alms and good Christian conduct outside the Monastery, but if he wants to join the crack troops and go the whole way, he should come inside.

“Another thing, Father. I’ve heard that on the battlefield it happens every once in a while that the quartermasters have to use the ammunition as well as supply it. In a pinch a quartermaster can shoot a gun like the best of them. It’s the same way with God’s quartermasters. Aren’t we lay-brothers supposed to be experts with the machine gun of good example? Aren’t there lots of times when we shoulder the rifle of good works — feeding the poor at the Monastery door and such things? There’s even times when we go in for bigger weapons, especially in the missions where we can teach catechism and baptize in emergencies. These things aren’t our regular work, but we’re ready for them if we’re good quartermasters.

“Still another thing about us quartermasters is that we follow the fighting men right into the fray when there’s need for

it. Look at the brothers in the missions. Quartermaster-commandoes, that's what they are. And you'll find us by the side of the priest serving at the altar, working in the sacristy, calling him to the confessional, and keeping him supplied with the material needs for preparing his sermons or writing his articles."

Brother Giles was getting eloquent. I could not help thinking that if he could only get into the pulpit all our vocation problems would be settled. "Where shall we spread this information about God's quartermasters, then?" I asked, getting practical.

"Everywhere, Father, everywhere where there are young and earnest men who are willing to be full-time soldiers for Christ. It's easier to get into the quartermaster corps of God's crack-troops than it is to get into some of the other corps. A lay-brother doesn't have to have all the schooling necessary for a priest. Of course, the recruits have to be healthy in body and mind. You have to be that to get into

any regiment that has a tough training schedule. But that's all that's necessary besides the honest will to give your life to the service of the Mystical Body.

"Look at our history. Take the quartermasters who won the medals — the lay-brothers whom the Church has beatified or canonized. They came from all states of life. Saint Seraphim of Montegranaro was a bricklayer. Blessed Crispin of Viterbo was a shoemaker. Saint Felix of Cantalice was a farmer. Blessed Bernard of Corleone was a swordsman. Saint Benedict the Moor was a Negro slave. Blessed Gerard of Cagnoli was a nobleman. Saint Paschal Baylon was a herdsman. —

"But why go on? It's evident enough that the quartermaster corps of God's army is open to all — to all who are ready to sacrifice their lives to the humble service of Christ and His Church.

"Ah, Father," and here Brother Giles thumped the soft ground with his cane, "if I could only tell the world and its thousands of young men what they are

missing—and how much they are needed.”

I resolved then and there that Brother Giles would get his chance. That is why I have written this.

May God's grace follow these words and give us more quartermasters for Christ.



ARE YOU INTERESTED?

If you are leading a good moral life; if you are ready to give up the world and everything in it for the more perfect life with God, — you should give serious thought to the possibility of embracing the Religious Life in the capacity of a Lay Brother. For a list of religious communities in need of vocations, consult your pastor or confessor.

Published by

THE CATHOLIC INFORMATION SOCIETY

214 West 31st St., New York 1, N. Y.

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