

**Mass for Father-Son Holiness Pilgrimage
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**Mundelein Seminary
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My dear brothers in Christ: in 1933, Archbishop John Timothy McNicholas, Archbishop of Cincinnati, led a campaign in his diocese to warn the faithful about the moral dangers of motion pictures being produced by Hollywood. His outspoken stand on this topic led to the formation of what was called the Legion of Decency, a national organization which worked with Hollywood to try to create movies which respected the moral values supported by the Catholic Church.¹

Within its first year, the Legion counted two million members, followed by seven million the following year.² In addition to working directly to influence Hollywood, the Legion was also effective indirectly by encouraging its members to boycott those movies which promoted ideas and images which were deemed to be morally questionable or offensive. Even though Hollywood would continue to push the envelope with motion pictures, it nevertheless had to keep “the Legion in mind as it produced new movies.”³

It can be easy to idealize the efforts of the Legion of Decency, seeing it as a one-stop solution to providing for the much-needed moral guidance when it comes to producing movies. There is even a feeling among Catholics today that if the Church were to be vocal once again through a similar approach to that of the Legion, we would be in a better place as a society, particularly with regard to the media.

In this regard, you may not be aware that Catholic News Service provides a review of movies from a moral perspective and rates them according to six classifications ranging from A-I, indicating that a movie is suitable for general patronage, to O, which means the movie is morally offensive. These movie reviews and classifications can be found at the Catholic News Service website, which is www.catholicnews.com/movies.

While one cannot underestimate the significance that such an organized effort makes in this matter, there is just as great of a need for individuals to take responsibility for what they allow themselves to be exposed to, not just with movies, but with other forms of media as well.

In our Gospel for today, we hear Jesus tell His disciples that “the lamp of the body is the eye. If your eye is sound, your whole body will be filled with light; but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be in

darkness” (Matthew 6:22-23). Jesus encourages us to be vigilant with regards to what we allow ourselves to watch. Not practicing such vigilance can result in our being desensitized to the immorality of those ideas and images that we see, thus darkening our vision from seeing the light of truth preached in the Gospel and the teachings of the Church.

In our society, there are many forms of entertainment to captivate our attention. No longer do we just need to concern ourselves with movies, but also television programs, video games, the Internet, and other forms of social media. We are constantly bombarded with these images and there is little hope that the landscape will change for the better in the near future, even if a concerted effort was made on the part of the Church.

What we can control is how we respond to this situation. We are called upon to be accountable in striving to guard ourselves from those things which threaten to distort our view of the truth, particularly with regard to the dignity of human nature. This may be where the Legion of Decency was most successful, as its members were asked to make a yearly pledge in which they took the personal responsibility of protecting themselves. The pledge included the following words: “I acknowledge my obligation to form a right conscience about pictures that are dangerous to

my moral life. I pledge myself to remain away from them.”⁴

We cannot rely solely on what others are able to do for us when it comes to growing as men of virtue. It is always more convenient to point the finger at what somebody other than ourselves should be doing in order to protect us from falling into bad habits and sin. The more difficult path is the one in which we embrace the struggle personally and fight courageously to overcome adversity when it comes upon us.

Your time on this pilgrimage is an opportunity for you to be strengthened in your resolve to take that personal responsibility for living a life of virtue. Being with other likeminded males, we draw encouragement from one another and realize that this struggle is not one that we undertake by ourselves. We do it together, and our effectiveness in this struggle will be greater as a result of the bond that we form with one another as men.

For those of you who are fathers, you have a great responsibility and obligation to provide for your family and to protect them, materially and spiritually. This means ensuring that you take an active role in helping your spouse and children to remain on the narrow path that leads to eternal life, and gently but firmly working to lead them back to that path if they have wandered from it.

An absolutely essential part of this role of providing and protecting is to make sure that you yourselves are striving to practice your faith. The power of the good example that you set in this regard cannot be underestimated. This includes being committed to growing in the many virtues that are a part of our Catholic tradition. Again, see the other fathers here as a resource to assist you. Seek the advice and wisdom of one another, and support one another by holding one another accountable. Encourage and challenge one another to become strong Catholic men who live their vocation with dedication and joy.

For those of you who are sons, it is also important for you to recognize the obligation that you have for embracing your faith and striving to grow in virtue daily. While you look to your fathers and other Catholic men for a good example, do not focus solely on that. Take ownership of your faith and ask the Lord for the graces that you need to become the man that the Lord is calling you to be.

Once again, see in the other young men around you a resource to assist you in this journey. In a society which places so much attention on virtual friendship through forms of social media, strive to form true friendships rooted in the love of God and a desire to do His will. These

relationships will sustain you as you continue to mature, providing strength and encouragement as you are confronted with the many challenges that young men face in our culture today. With God's grace and the companionship of a fellow soldier of Christ, there is no battle that you will fight alone and God will ensure that you emerge victorious in the struggle.

We would all do well to be reminded of the words that Jesus gave to His disciples when using the image of the vine and the branches to describe their relationship with Him. He tells them, and us, that "without me, you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Therefore, our union with Christ must be the first and most important priority in our lives. Without Him, we have no hope for success. We are to remain close to Him always so that His grace will fortify us so that we can say, like St. Paul, that "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13 RSV). Jesus gives us that strength to do all things in a very special way each time we receive the Eucharist. Let us ask Him for that strength today and each time we receive this great gift so that we will have the daily bread we need to be the Catholic men He has called us to be, soldiers and disciples for the Lord who will continue to fight for and build up the Kingdom of God.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Fortin, Roger A. *Faith and Action: A History of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati, 1821-1996*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2002. 274.

² Miner, Brad. "Lost Legion of Decency." *First Things*, 2013. www.firstthings.com.

³ *ibid.*

⁴ *ibid.*