

The Story Of Edel Quinn

By a Legionary of Mary.

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Edel Quinn was born in Kanturk, County Cork on 14 September, 1907, on the Feast of the Holy Cross. At age 17, the family settled in Dublin.

Her character was full of gaiety and vivacity, a sense of humour, with a touch of mischief. She loved music, dancing and the sporting activities of tennis and cricket. From infancy she was full of unselfishness and consideration for others. She was obedient, courageous, disciplined and loyal to her duties with a strong supernatural spirit... She was undoubtedly holy, sensible, and practical. Bishops, priests and laymen, had profound respect for her.

Edel was inclined to gain entry into religious life by entering the Poor Clare Convent in Belfast. This was postponed due to her poor health and, being the eldest of five children, she instead was to help secure a proper education for the younger children. Each family member had a special place in her heart. She lived with her parents for a long period of time.

She became very devoted to the Eucharist; at confirmation she took the name Eucharist Josephine.

Edel believed that God's Will is the only thing that matters in life. Her spirituality was most faithful. It included daily spiritual reading, mental prayer, the recitation of the entire Rosary and the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin. Later she added the Divine Office on Sundays. On one occasion during her thanksgiving after Holy Communion someone noticed her face was transfigured, it seemed to be lit up by a brightness from within.

Edel told a priest that she prayed daily for the graces of loving God with her whole heart and to make others love Him. She was determined to suffer a martyr's death.

She was employed as a secretary, and she was diligent and meticulous with her duties and possessed personal charm and loyalty to her employer. Under her influence he later became a very fervent Catholic.

Daily before work she attended the week-day Mass. On Sundays she spent many hours completely devoted to as she normally offered four Masses. She said that life is desolate without the Eucharist. Undoubtedly, Edel had a profound reverence to the Blessed Sacrament.

After becoming aware of the Legion of Mary, Edel became curious in knowing more information about the Legion. She became a member of the praesidium with the title: "Our Lady of Victories," at Ozanam House, [Blessed] Frederick Ozanam being the founder of the St Vincent de Paul Society. Her initial duties included hospital visitation and home to home visitation in a slum area. Apparently, she hated visitations, but she was however, vigorous in contributing far more than 2 hours apostolic duties weekly. She performed apostolic work virtually daily. Edel later became member to two distinct praesidia.

At age 22, after two years membership, she became president of a praesidium with the aim of rescuing street girls in Dublin.

Like Frank Duff, she also had pleasure in reading about Catholic doctrine and throughout her life her spirituality compelled her to read St. Louis Marie de Montfort's "True Devotion to Mary." and "The Secret of Mary " as well as writings by St. Therese of Liseaux [who is now a Doctor of the Church because of her profound insight into Catholic doctrine and spirituality].

Edel became determined to be obedient to Mary, 'with Mary and through Mary' and gained an aspiration of offering her attention to Mary, since Mary was the teacher of love for Jesus. This led her to a profound relation with the Blessed Trinity. Edel developed a complete abandonment to God's Will. It increased her devotion to the Blessed Eucharist, her dedication to Mary as the "Sacrament" of the Holy Spirit, and her zeal for souls.

In 1936, at age 29, it was discovered that she was in the advance stage of tuberculosis. Though being placed in a sanatorium for 1 year, she developed an attitude of consoling others. Though terminally ill, she in good spirit returned to secretarial work with the Legion and continued attending daily Mass.

Though being fully aware of the perils which were inevitable but also after being reassured that Holy Communion would be available daily, Edel's plead for envoyship to East and Central Africa (a job which meant she was to attempt to set up more local groups of the Legion of Mary) was confirmed by the Concilium (the headquarters of the Legion of Mary).

Prior her envoyship to Africa, she went on a pilgrimage to Lourdes where she consecrated her work in Africa to our Lady and begged her blessing to it. When leaving for Africa, Edel said to a friend: "Perhaps my health will improve in Africa and then, when I have finished my work, I'll become a Poor Clare nun."

On 24 October, 1936, Edel Quinn was sent to East Africa to establish the lay apostolate of the Legion of Mary. Through prayer and faith she was encouraged to carry her Cross during her life across East Africa whilst still suffering illness.

On 23 November 1936, she arrived at Mombasa in Kenya and was immediately destined for Nairobi in Kenya, the centre of her activities.

At that time Nairobi had a population of 60,000 Africans, 30,000 East Indians and 10,000 Europeans. However there was widespread segregation and discrimination. Bishop Heffernan, who had appealed to the Concilium for an envoy, gave approval to Edel to encourage the clergy and some of the more prominent lay Catholics to assist Edel with her determination of uniting all Catholics in a single apostolic force under the leadership of the Blessed Virgin.

Edel was told that the Africans especially, would never accept or at least persevere in the Legion because of its strict discipline and insistence on regular apostolic work. But Edel knew that through prayer and grace, faith and courage, success is possible and by God's grace it would be imminent. With her fine sensitivity and keen realistic mind she was well aware that she faced a gigantic undertaking of evangelisation and recruitment and she was aware that she was practically all alone.

Successful recruitments impressed missionaries throughout the huge Diocese of Nairobi. The Legion was beginning to flourish. One of the priests noted that her conduct was always prudent and flawless.

In Nairobi, despite the initial pessimism, Edel launched 2 praesidia, a European-Indian integration group and an all African group within 3 weeks. The basic unit of the Legion is called a Praesidium, which is normally based in a single parish. A Curia is the next level above, handling several Praesidia. On April 4, 1937, she established the first Curia and the first Acies of the Legion in East Africa which was held in the Church of St. Peter Claver, the Church of the Africans. It was also historically the first time that Europeans, Indians and Africans came together for a religious event. The Acies is a ceremony that renews and expresses the Legionaries' Consecration to Mary, the Queen and Mother of Jesus. It is the central annual function of the Legion. Apart from travel and the physical and mental strain concerning her duties, other difficulties often involved a painful lack of sympathy and co-operation from others. Though many praesidia were established she made strong efforts to have the new Legionaries to study the handbook rules and to undertake visitations in pairs. This visitation often brought about numerous conversions to the faith.

Edel showed her phenomenal powers of endurance and "iron will" whilst climatic heat was overwhelming. In one day she attended 3 meetings to explain the Legionary duties and especially to ensure that officers were given proper training in the Legion spirit and discipline in accordance with the Legion handbook. She placed much emphasis in establishing extensions to the work of spreading the Legion spirit amongst Catholics and out to the un-evangelized.

Frank Duff, the Legion's founder, declared that Edel Quinn had the strongest will that he had ever encountered.

Outside Nairobi, in order to successfully make people aware of the Legion and under various harsh climatic and geographical conditions, Edel had the courage to travel throughout Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, and Malawi.

As her labours were crowned with success beyond all human expectations, many missionaries described Edel as a person of serene faith and courage to face and overcome every obstacle. Frank Duff described her as "utterly undaunted, she just laughed her way through obstacles".

Near the end of 1938, after having recuperated from an illness of malaria, she continued her mission. After a long delay she visited Mauritius in January 1940. By permission of the Archbishop, Edel established 30 flourishing praesidia before returning to Africa in September 1940.

In the spring of 1941, her health was rapidly deteriorating, but she continued her work in the Vicariate of Nyasaland (now Malawi) where she was receiving great support in her work from the Vicar Apostolic, Bishop Julien, a French Canadian. Within 18 months, although having been admitted to various hospitals, Edel continued her apostolate by correspondence. Most of her time in hospital was spent with the Dominican Sisters at Umlamli in the Cape Province, South Africa. In Umlamli she received Holy Communion but was too weak to visit the chapel due to its distance from her bed.

Having realized that there was hope of establishing the Legion of Mary in China and Japan, she was determined to ask for the envoyship to go there but she was prevented due to her ill health, so she only went there in spirit.

In October 1942, with the consent of her doctor, Edel returned to Nairobi where she could attend daily Mass and the climate would be more suitable for her health.

In January, 1943, on arriving in Nairobi, her friends were shocked to see that she was dreadfully thin, her hair was greying and Edel appeared many years older than her age. She soon managed to

found new praesidia and also visited many of her old praesidia. She also established praesidia among the British troops in Nairobi.

Early in 1944, she made a retreat in the Carmelite Convent in Nairobi as her preparation for death. Later she spent some time in the Vicariate of Kilimanjaro, in Tanzania, and lastly visited Kisumu in Kenya where the Legion was also flourishing.

On 11 April, 1944, having returned to Nairobi, she suffered greatly from frequent heart attacks

12 May, 1944, a priest visiting the convent gave her Extreme Unction. Edel died with the Holy Name on her lips and in the New Testament she had placed a bookmark in John Chapter 14. "Let not your heart be troubled... I go to prepare a place for you."

Edel Quinn's funeral was celebrated by Bishop Heffernan in the presence of twenty priests with a large congregation of Legionaries. She was later buried in the Missionaries' Cemetery.

On 15 December, 1994, Pope John Paul II, in a special assembly of the Cardinals and other members of the Congregation for the Causes of the Saints, made the following solemn declaration: "It is certain that the servant of God, Edel Quinn, a secular virgin, practiced to a heroic degree the theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity towards God and her neighbours, and likewise, the cardinal virtues of Prudence, Justice, Temperance and Fortitude."

Let us recall some of Edel's last words "What boundless trust we should have in God's love!" "We must do what we can for God and rely on Him to give us each day the strength for the work he expects of us." "The weakness which He leaves in us must not hold us back from our desires, it is our share in his sufferings."
