



«Legionarios a morir»: the oath of love to the Cristo de la Buena Muerte

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Every year, on Holy Thursday, a rite is renewed in Spain that goes far beyond folklore and tradition. Even today, as per a now century-old custom, this sacred, intimate, and collective moment takes place, in which the *Legión Española* pays homage to the *Cristo de la Buena Muerte*, its *Sagrado Protector*. A deep and indissoluble bond between soldiers and faith, between memory and present, between those who marched in the desert under the scorching sun and those who, in the silence of the night, still pray for those who did not return.

To admire the unique and extraordinary spectacle, a child, in some ways, of increasingly distant times, in a progressive and increasingly secular Spain, people come from every corner of the Iberian Peninsula. Some travel all night, with children in tow and eyes still full of sleep, to be there at dawn, in the front row, under the ancient walls of *Málaga*.

The tradition dates back to 1921, the year when the bond between the *Congregación del Santísimo Cristo de la Buena Muerte y Ánimas* (also known as *Cristo de Mena*) and the *Legión Española* began. Since then, every Holy Thursday, over 160 legionnaires take part in the solemn

acts that culminate in the transport of the Christ through the city, carried on the shoulders of its faithful soldiers.

An anthem to the soldier and Christianity, where the march of the man in uniform merges

In front of the church doors, the Spanish Navy (the *Armada*) is lined up in silence, honoring the *Virgin of Solitude*, who has protected them since the times of the *battle of Lepanto*. Meanwhile, in the distance, the Legion sings "*El novio de la muerte*", ready to walk the streets of Málaga with the fast and solemn pace that characterizes it: 160 steps per minute.

The entire city holds its breath. The sidewalks are full of people, thousands, all there for that moment. For that heartbeat of honor that crosses the entire Spain.

When the legionnaires of the *Tercio Alejandro Farnesio of Ronda* make their entrance in *Fray Alonso de Santo Tomás square*, the crowd erupts. Almería, Ceuta, Melilla, and Ronda take turns every year to carry

Every gesture, every look, every note is full of emotion. The Christ is handed over to the *Tercio* that will guard it for the coming year. Then, in the most absolute silence, broken only by the rhythmic sound of boots on the stone ground, it is led to the church door. Outside, the banners rise. The Spanish national anthem accompanies the exit of the sacred image. It is a solemn moment. The crowd is moved. Tears flow freely.

The Christ is lifted by his soldiers. The **Himno Legionario** pierces the air, followed by the silence of the Our Father and the Hail Mary. The bis

The Christ is finally lifted inside the *salón de tronos* with an ancient system of ropes and pulleys. It is placed in the exact spot where its procession will begin. 248 men, in white tunics, girdles, and black chests with the emblem of the *Congregación de Mena*, will carry it through the streets of the city. And it is then that the square resounds even louder: «**¡Legionarios a luchar, legionarios a morir!**».

The *Credo Legionario*, inspired by the Japanese bushido by Millán Astray, echoes between the walls. «**It is better to die in combat than to live as a coward**», they shout with pride, knowing that in those words lies the deepest meaning of their

And the Christ, up there, watches them. And protects them.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PhcrI2EHFI4>