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An Apostolate of the  
Society of Jesus under the  
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Episcopal Conference

### **DIAMOND JUBILEE IN CHICAGO**

*This is part of the sermon preached by Fr Bernard J. McGuckian, S.J. Central Spiritual Director, Pioneer Association at the Concelebrated Mass to mark the Diamond Jubilee of the Chicago Pioneers on May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2013 in DesPlaines, Illinois.*

On July 8, 1989 I spoke to a small number of men and women in the parish of Gatang'a, Kenya about the Pioneer Association. Sister Mary Nyambura, at the time a novice with the Sisters of Emmanuel, based in the parish had seen my Pioneer emblem featuring the Heart of Christ and wondered what it was about. When she heard my explanation she asked if I would tell others about it. She assembled a small group of 10 women and 2 men. I explained that the idea behind the Pioneers was very simple, so simple that it was not beyond the capacity of a child to understand it. The aim of the Pioneers is to bring about a change in the lives of people who have become addicted to alcohol, to their own cost and that of those near and dear to them.

Pioneers commit themselves to doing three very simple things: firstly, to pray each day of their lives for people who have become addicted; secondly, to freely forgo the normal pleasure attaching to alcohol in solidarity with those addicted and, thirdly, to go public about it by wearing a little discreet emblem of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the "abyss of all virtues" on the lapels of their coat. I added that if they did this they would see miracles. About six months later, a woman recognised me in the street and came over to speak to me. She had been at the meeting. "Father" she said "You said that if we followed the three Pioneer rules, we would see miracles". "I did". "I have already seen the miracles" "Really" "I can now pay the school fees of my children for the first time in my life. My husband has stopped drinking and he brings home his wages every week". That is the miracle.

That was July 8, 1989, my own mother's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. By July 1999, her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday, a plane load of Pioneers made their way to Dublin for the Centenary of the Association. She missed her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday by a few months in 2009. By that time the number of Pioneers linked to that meeting of 12 was well in excess of 20,000. In August of this year, 2013, the Kenyans will host the Pan-African Congress of the Pioneers.

"Rejoice with me for I have found my lost sheep". The woman in that street within sight of Mount Kenya was in effect asking me to rejoice with her. She had turned to the Good Shepherd, whose Heart is an Infinite Ocean of Mercy and her prayer was heard. In founding the Pioneers, Fr James Aloysius Cullen was initiating a campaign of prayer and fasting, taking inspiration from the words of Our Saviour when he came down from the Mount of the Transfiguration and found the disciples trying to cure a boy who was mysteriously afflicted. The Apostles were unable to cure the boy. His

father appealed to Jesus. Jesus asked him, "Do you believe that I can cure your son?". The man answered. "I believe Lord, help my unbelief". Jesus then cured the boy. Afterwards the disciples asked Jesus, "Why could we not cure the boy?" They were aware that Jesus had given them miraculous powers. Jesus answered, "This kind can only be cast out by prayer and fasting".

This evening we celebrate 60 years of fidelity by people over the years in this great city. It is wonderful to see so many here tonight, both Pioneers and people who have supported them through the years. They have opted for another honourable course as people who have used the good gift of wine wisely. Indeed the Pioneer prayer has been answered when others drink wisely. Pioneers pray that others will opt for one or other of the only reasonable courses with regard to alcohol: either moderate use or complete abstinence. There is no acceptable third choice.

The Pioneers have been a feature of life in Chicago for 60 years. May the Lord richly bless those who have been so faithful over that long period. I think no one would object if I single out for mention, Jim Staunton. Jim has been an extraordinarily faithful servant of the Sacred Heart since calling his first Pioneer meeting in the Church of St Catherine of Siena way back in 1953, the year when Dwight Eisenhower replaced Harry Truman as President of the United States.

If those who come after have something of the fidelity of those who have gone before, the Pioneers will still be a force to be reckoned with, when the Centenary arrives in 40 years' time.