

Recovering Our Pioneer Roots

We Pioneers are in a process of examining our roots as we face into the challenges of the Third Millennium. This requires a sustained effort to explore in depth the charism, a special gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church, which led Fr James Cullen to found the Pioneer Association in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. According to the teaching of the Servant of God, Pope Paul VI, this effort will help us identify what is to be done to adapt our Association to the demands of the twenty-first century. Obviously, there are things that are obsolete today and have to be changed. However there are aspects of the Association that will never change. Fr Cullen was convinced that an association based on prayer, abstinence and public witness in honour of the Sacred Heart of Jesus could make a valuable contribution to life in society. This is as valid today as in his lifetime.

FATHER CULLEN'S METHOD

The biography of Fr Cullen by Fr Lambert McKenna, published in 1924, just three years after the founder's death is an important source of information on Fr Cullen's thinking. The following passage tells how he first involved himself in promoting Sacred Heart Devotion:

"In November, 1887, he (Fr Cullen) received the diploma formally appointing him Director for Ireland of the Apostleship of Prayer. This was an important event in his life-indeed we may say, in the history of religious life of Ireland- for it marks the beginning of that wonderful spread of devotion to the Sacred Heart for which our country is so remarkable to-day"(page 100). A short time after receiving this appointment Fr McKenna tells us that "he made use of the admirable organisation of the Apostleship of Prayer to promote the cause of Temperance, and founded what he styled the 'Total Abstinence League of the Sacred Heart,' as a branch of the Apostleship of Prayer". (page 103)

He initiated a large number of men and women into this "League" in St Peter's, Belfast in 1889. Two years later in 1891, the Servant of God, Matt Talbot, now seven years a non-drinker, joined the League. Some years later in December 1898, building on this foundation, Fr Cullen started the "Brooch League" or "Pioneers" at the famous meeting with the four ladies in St Francis Xavier's Church, Gardiner St. Dublin. The first large meeting of this Brooch League or Pioneers was on 16 October, 1901 when nine-hundred people turned up.

"By February, 1904, the whole Total Abstinence League of the Sacred Heart was in fair working order. It consisted of (1) those who took Temporary Pledges, (2) the Pioneers, (3) the Promoters, (4) the Juvenile Branches. All these were different battalions of the one army, and were distinguished from all other Temperance organisations by their being sections of the Apostleship of Prayer." (page 125)

WHAT IS THE APOSTLESHIP OF PRAYER?

In 1844, in a Jesuit House of Studies in France, the young men were finding their years of study long and tedious. One of their teachers invited them to offer up their studies to the Sacred Heart for God's blessing on the Missions of the Church and explained to them that in this way they could be participating in all the work going on and receiving the merit of their good-will, even before they found themselves in the Mission fields. This idea caught on. In a very short time it had spread out into the whole Church where people began offering up their "prayers, works, joys and sufferings of their day for all the intentions of the Sacred Heart". About forty years later, Fr Cullen came on the scene and was appointed to promote the Apostleship in Ireland. As a step in this direction he founded the *Messenger of the Sacred Heart* in 1888. We all know how successful it has been.

When Fr Cullen saw how Devotion to the Sacred Heart could move people to lead lives of religious

fervour, he conceived the idea of adapting the principles of the Apostleship of Prayer to combat the evils of the abuse of drink in Ireland. What ensued was the Temperance League of the Sacred Heart. Eventually, one section of this League, the Pioneer Branch, became so successful that the word 'Pioneer' soon replaced the word 'League'. Furthermore, the Pioneer Branch became so big that it got detached from the Apostleship of Prayer and became an independent association, largely based in Ireland. Later Irish missionaries would take it to countries around the globe.

The Apostleship of Prayer itself, which began in a House of Studies in France became so successful that its Headquarters moved to Rome. Today, under the direction of the Society of Jesus in over 70 countries around the world, it directs a wide variety of initiatives for the promotion of Catholic faith and practice. It has contact with over 40,000,000 people who recite the 'Morning Offering' daily for the Pope's intentions. The Pioneer Heroic Offering was a development of this concept.

THE APOSTLESHIP OF PRAYER TODAY

On 21 June 2011, the Fr General of the Society of Jesus asked me to become the National Director of the Apostleship of Prayer for Ireland. Given the origins of the Pioneer Association in the Apostleship of Prayer, the idea appealed to me. I think that it should be possible to develop links of mutual benefit to the two organisations. Recently, I have made contact with all the Directors of the Apostleship of Prayer in the different European countries where it still flourishes. These Directors are involved in projects to promote the faith in countries where concerted resistance to religion has been a feature of national life for much longer than in Ireland. This means that they have been confronted with problems that are relatively new to us in Ireland. I had much to learn from them.

Having been involved directly with the Pioneer Association for almost forty years now, I am aware of the fidelity, commitment and dedication of our



Fr James Aloysius Cullen, SJ – founder of the Pioneer Association and the Messenger of the Sacred Heart.

membership. At present, these qualities may be called upon as we face even bigger dangers than those of intemperance. We should be thinking about raising our sights. To say that the faith itself is in real danger today in some quarters is hardly an exaggeration.

When Fr Cullen first began promoting temperance in Ireland he could take it for granted that both those who had developed alcohol problems and those who wanted to do something about them shared a common commitment to the faith. That cannot be taken for granted today. As an Ecclesial Association we Pioneers, like all other concerned Christians, are being challenged to involve ourselves in what Blessed John Paul II called the 'New Evangelisation'.

It will take a great deal of creative activity to convince many of our contemporaries of the value of having their children baptized, initiating them into the peaceful consequences of frequentation of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the helps to happiness to be found in the Eucharist, the supernatural strength given in Confirmation to face life's challenges, the wisdom of contracting a Sacramental Marriage, the need for Priestly Ordination in a functioning Christian community and the consolations of the Final Rites of the Church.

One of the ancient Fathers of the Church once described the Eucharist as 'the daily drug of immortality'. A full sacramental life is a wonderful antidote to addictions of any kind.