

# THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS AND THE PIONEERS

**FR BERNARD J MCGUCKIAN SJ, Central Spiritual Director, Pioneer Total Abstinence Association of the Sacred Heart preached at the Mass in the Dominican Church, Pope Quay attended by Pioneers from different parts of the Cork diocese on Wednesday 7th September 2011**

In 1994, I visited a group of Pioneers in the town of Uppington, situated on the Orange River, some 500 miles south-west of Johannesburg. The local parish priest, Fr Robert Hindley, a native of Philadelphia, told me that some years previously, at daily Mass in his parish, he noticed a newcomer. He was a young black African. Fr Hindley couldn't help noticing how devoutly he assisted daily at morning Mass although he never actually spoke to him. One night after a few weeks, he was called out to the scene of an accident on the outskirts of the town. He was shocked to see the young man lying dead at the side of the road. He had been killed, as it later transpired, by a drunken driver. Fr Hindley regretted that he had not made an effort earlier to speak to the young man and get to know him. A few days later, the police came to Fr Hindley's house. They told him that the young man had been wearing some religious emblem on his coat the night he died. They did not know what it was but they thought it appropriate that Fr Hindley should have it. It was a Pioneer Pin.

Fr Hindley put it in a drawer. Over subsequent months when he was fishing for papers in the drawer he often came across the pin. When this had happened a few times, he said to himself "this pin is saying something to me" He then pointed to his own Pioneer Pin. "This is why I am a Pioneer. And this evening you will see something else when we visit Bishop John Baptist Minder, also from Philadelphia. He too wears a Pioneer Pin. Both of us have become Pioneers as a result of that tragic event".

The event brought back to my mind a conversation I had had years earlier with Fr Sean McCarron, who was Central Director of the Pioneers in the 1940s and early 1950s. When I learned that my work would be with the Pioneers I once asked him "What is the Pioneer Association all about?" He thought for a few seconds and then gave me his answer. "The Pioneer dies to drink, that others might live". When I heard this I told him that



he need say no more. I had enough to go on for the rest of my life. It struck me that Fr McCarron's words were realized in a dramatic and literal way in the life of that young African. I do not know his name but I'm sure he must have received a warm welcome from the Sacred Heart the night he died.

Fr James Cullen (1841-1921) asked Pioneers to wear an emblem of the Sacred Heart, not to tell others that we do not drink, but as a public proclamation that in the Heart of Christ there is an answer to all our problems. He would have resonated with a prayer of St Madeline Sophie Barat, Foundress of the Religious of the Sacred Heart who saw in the Sacred Heart "a remedy for

all our ills, relief for all our miseries, reparation for all our faults". Fr Cullen's thinking has been in line with that of all the Popes of modern times. It must have been a consolation to him when Leo XIII consecrated the whole human race to the Sacred Heart in June of 1899, less than six months after the founding of the Pioneer Association basing it solidly on Devotion to that Heart. Pope Benedict XVI is carrying on in the same line as his predecessors in promoting devotion to the Sacred Heart. On 20 August, 2011 in Madrid he consecrated all the Youth of the World to the Sacred Heart. The police on duty said they had never seen anything as impressive as the total silence of upwards of 2,000,000 young people as the Holy Father pronounced the words of consecration.

*"With ardent prayer, I consecrate them to your Heart, so that, rooted and built up in you, they will always be yours, in life and in death, May they never turn away from you"*

## **Fr Cullen's Talk in City Hall, Cork, 1911**

A century ago, Fr Cullen addressed a large gathering in the City Hall, Cork. His account on that night in 1911 of the origins and early development of the Pioneer Association is the most authoritative ever given on the subject. He outlined how he took inspiration from

the ground-breaking work, carried out here in Cork by Father Theobald Mathew, known universally as the Apostle of Temperance. He also showed his appreciation for the work done in the cause of temperance by men from other Christian denominations, instancing a Mr George Carr, a Protestant clergyman who started a temperance pledge movement in 1829 in Fr Cullen's native town of New Ross. Fr Cullen learned from all those who had gone before him, noting their strengths and weaknesses. In December 1898, after much trial, error and serious reflection he made his own definitive move in the cause of temperance when he founded the Pioneer Association with his invitation to four ladies to join him in a campaign of prayer. His initial inspiration was that persevering prayer to the Sacred Heart of Jesus would lessen the widespread heartbreak and sorrow caused in Irish life by the abuse of drink. Twenty years later, by the end of the First World War, the initial four women had become upwards of 240,000 Irish men and women. It is no exaggeration to say that what took place over those two decades was truly a moral miracle at a national level in our country.

He told his Cork audience on that night of his frustration in his efforts to promote temperance over previous decades. However this changed in 1887 when he was appointed Director for Ireland of a movement called the Apostleship of Prayer. According to Fr McKenna, his biographer, "this was an important event in the history of religious life in Ireland – for it marks the beginning of that wonderful spread of devotion to the Sacred Heart for which our country is so remarkable today". Fr McKenna goes on to tell us that "he (Fr Cullen) 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".

### **Apostleship of Prayer**

As a branch of the Apostleship of Prayer the roots of the Pioneer Association are to be found in the Revelations to St Margaret Mary in seventeenth century France. As children we may not have known very much about the Apostleship of Prayer but it was behind our mothers' encouragement to us to "offer up our prayers, works, joys and sufferings of each day for the intentions of the Sacred Heart". The idea of "offering up" unpleasant and unavoidable things came from the Apostleship of Prayer.

The Apostleship of Prayer began in a Jesuit House of Studies in Eastern France in 1844. The young students had been fired with the desire to head out to India to spread the faith there. They began reading books about Indian history, Indian ways of thought, even learning Indian languages. But one of the professors noticed that they were ignoring their basic studies of philosophy and theology. If they did this they would not really understand the faith they proposed to preach. He convinced them that during in their years of study, their

mission field was their studies. They would glorify God more by attending to their philosophy and theology while that was what they were supposed to be doing. If they consecrated their studies to the Sacred Heart, He would be with them in all their endeavours.

These young men responded generously and began telling the people in the parishes round about that to be an apostle it was not necessary to travel to India. If people put their whole hearts into their ordinary work in the fields, the kitchen, the school-room, the factory, the office, the hospital and offered it up to the Sacred Heart, they would be doing God's work and working out their own salvation. The idea caught on and spread like wild fire around the whole Catholic world.

Fr Cullen embraced the idea enthusiastically. To promote it, he founded the *Messenger* magazine in 1888 and there could hardly be anyone in Ireland who has not heard of it. He then harnessed the idea to promoting temperance. The Pioneer Prayer is an extension of the Morning Offering. We simply add to the Morning Offering a simple promise to do without alcohol for the reasons well known to all of us who say the Pioneer Prayer twice each day as our membership requires.

### **Heart of Jesus, Abys of all Virtues**

Fr Cullen must have felt vindicated in his initiative in turning to the Sacred Heart for help when the Litany of the Sacred Heart was prescribed for the whole Church on 2 April 1899, less than four months after he founded the Pioneers. One of the invocations in particular would have struck him: "Heart of Jesus, abyss of all virtues". This implied that the Virtue of Temperance was to be found in the Heart of Jesus. It was a gift to be asked for earnestly and often. He wanted the Pioneer to do this twice every day of their lives. He asked them to add an act of self-denial or a sort of a fast to ensure that their prayer would be heard. He believed that the "demon of intemperance" was one of those that Jesus said could only be "driven out by prayer and fasting" Mark 9:29.

### **Conclusion**

Fr Cullen appealed to the generosity and spirit of compassion of the Irish people. They responded magnificently. His way is echoed in the words of a Spanish Jesuit priest, Tomas Morales, who only died within the last decade and whose Cause for Canonisation has already been introduced. He said: "If you ask something big from young people, they will give more. If you ask for little, they will give nothing".

We pray for the light needed to live out our Pioneer calling in the world of the 21st century. In many ways this is presenting us with challenges more daunting than any that faced our forebears. But we are in the hands of the same Jesus who said to his apprehensive disciples. "In the world you will have hardships, but have courage, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).