

**Address by Cardinal Sean Brady at Mass of Thanksgiving
at Knock Shrine on 25 July 2009**

I thank you, Fr Courtney, for the honour of your invitation to preside at this Mass of Thanksgiving. It is a privilege and a joy to be part of this Pilgrimage of Thanksgiving which the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart make today to Knock, the National Shrine of Our Lady and to have as our Homilist, Fr Mark McDonald, MSC Superior General.

There is so much for which we want to give thanks to God today. First of all, we thank God for all his love for us – a love that is lavished upon each one of us through the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Today we are especially grateful for that valiant Parish Priest from Central France, Fr Jules Chevalier, the founder of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart. To him God gave the special gift of clearly understanding that the meeting place between God and all of human kind is in the Sacred Heart of Jesus. For it is in the heart of Jesus that each and every one of us is reconciled to God. I am sure that Fr Chevalier had meditated on those words of today's Gospel, "and immediately there came out of the pierced side of Christ, blood and water".

As a result he came to the conclusion that the water in question was none other than the Life-Giving Holy Spirit of God, the Spirit that fills our hearts with love, joy and peace. And so Fr Chevalier had this marvellous idea of founding a society. This Society would dedicate itself, first of all, to contemplating fully the humanity of Jesus. Its members would concentrate on the gentleness of Jesus, on His courage and humility and above all on His compassion.

It is the kind of compassionate love that gathers up and gathers in everybody, but especially those who suffer in body and mind and spirit. And the task of bringing that Good News is a task for every age and every nation. It was a brilliant insight because Fr Chevalier saw that once people really got to know Jesus in this way, they were going to follow Him. They would want to follow Him because they would see Him as their only hope of finding the healing and strength, we all need, to lead meaningful lives.

Today especially we give thanks to God for the Irish Missionaries of the Sacred Heart and for the Irish Province. We say thanks be to God for people like Fr John Mary Neenan and for his brothers, William and Daniel, and for their faith filled parents and family in Castlemagner, Co. Cork.

We thank God for Fr Michael Tierney, also of Co. Cork, of Churchtown, Mallow in fact, and for all who have helped him set up this Society at Western Road, Cork, in September 1909. For there the small Missionary Community went from strength to strength. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and with the magnificent support of so many generous and outstanding benefactors, they took on the formidable task of building a public church. But they needed that Church in which they could promote and follow their own specific spirituality and devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and to Our Lady of the Sacred Heart. Of course other foundations followed, for example, in Moyne Park, Co. Galway, in Carraig na bhFear and in Myross Wood, Co. Cork

The next inevitable and most happy stage was that of sending forth missionaries – go make disciples. The most significant departures are depicted on the cover of your Mass booklet – to Papua New Guinea, for example, in 1926, and to South Africa. And today we remember that in New Guinea three missionaries lost their lives tragically while serving their people during World War II. Further expansion followed to England and the United States, to Indonesia, Venezuela and most recently to the Caucasus region of Russia in 1995. One area of the Apostolate not noted in the booklet is the area of university teaching. I refer, of course, to the outstanding work of people like Fr Charles Conroy in the academic formation of students at the Gregorian University in Rome over many years.

Now, of course, I am well aware that none of this would have been at all possible without the magnificent support, both spiritual and temporal, which came from the wonderful, dedicated band of helpers of the Society. Their help is an outstanding example of the kind of help which all Christ's faithful are called to give in the building up of the Church here on earth. Today we salute and give thanks for the role played by the MSC benefactors over the last 100 years.

Today the Church in Ireland gives thanks to God for the presence in his midst of a group of people totally dedicated to making the heart of Jesus known and loved everywhere. What a treasure that is to have in our midst! What an asset it is to remind us that we have not here a lasting Kingdom, but we seek one, that is to come.

There is some talk and much hope of the arrival of green shoots of recovery in our midst these times. What if more and more people were to see and fully appreciate the forgiveness and kindness of God, as revealed in the loving heart of Jesus, as to see that as the authentic green shoot of the only recovery that really matters. As the late, great, Pope John Paul II told you in 2004 – “Look to the future, where the spirit is sending you to do even greater things”.

Amen.