

**Homily of Fr. Pat O'Sullivan MSC at the Mass of Thanksgiving in the Cathedral of St. Mary and St. Ann, Cork on Saturday, 16 May 2009 at 3pm**

When Fr. Michael Tierney from Churchtown near Mallow established the first foundation of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart at Western Road, Cork, in 1909, I'm sure his future planning never included thoughts of a large gathering in Cork one hundred years down the road. He was concerned with his own time, the Church of his time, and the role of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart and their friends in that Church. As he looked back he had particular reason to be thankful to a young Missionary of the Sacred Heart, John Mary Neenan, from the Parish of Castlemagner in North Cork, the first Irishman to join the Society - because it was through him that Fr. Tierney was introduced to the Society ... maybe one could say recruited for the Society.

Shortly after his ordination Fr. Tierney went to Australia, and after thirteen years there he moved to England in 1898, where he and others took charge of the Parish of Saints Alban & Stephen at St. Albans in Hertfordshire, where Missionaries of the Sacred Heart still serve to this day.

With a wide and positive experience of the Missionary of the Sacred Heart way of life in Australia and England, early in 1909 Fr. Tierney returned to Cork and received permission from the Bishop of Cork, Dr. Thomas O'Callaghan, to purchase 'Dyke House' at the top of the Mardyke, a property that would become known as Sacred Heart College, and in that year it was opened as an apostolic school or junior seminary with 12 students.

The first Missionary of the Sacred Heart Community was comprised of Fr. Tierney, Fr. James Fitzgibbon, Fr. John Power and Fr. Ludovicus Kopp. They, and their sense of vocation, their trust in God's faithfulness and the love of God experienced by them in and through the heart and person of Jesus his Son, are the main reason for our gathering in this beautiful Cathedral of St. Mary and St. Ann in the same City of Cork 100 years later. Theirs was not a merely human project, but a generous response to a particular calling and need within the Church of the time, the fruits of which have been shared by so many over the past 100 years.

Today we gather to celebrate, to thank, to take the opportunity to be nourished and renewed, to acknowledge one another, and to show our appreciation of one another. Past, present and future are not distinct separate eras, but rather a continuous tapestry being woven by the Master Craftsman, with each one of us having the privilege of cooperating with the weaver. We are not just looking back in a nostalgic way, but in a spirit of gratitude, recognising the solid foundation on which our present celebrations are built, and facing the future with trust and confidence in the one who is ever faithful and whose call is ever new.

At week-ends in our Churches, the priest will normally know most of the congregation, and will have a fair idea of the circumstances of their lives. This afternoon I am conscious of being in the company of many people I know, including fellow Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, parishioners, friends, but the vast majority of you I have never met, and yet you don't seem like strangers, or people I know nothing about. Most of you are

here probably because of a contact somewhere along the line with a particular member of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, and maybe through him got to know others. Maybe you made your contact as a benefactor, a member of our Mission Support Group. Today the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart present are deeply conscious of the vital role always played, and continuing to be played by our benefactors, in the work of the Society.

As in any family, you found great variety in our family too I'm sure, and hopefully a variety of gifts as well. You found dedication, commitment, success, and failure, but hopefully always people with genuine humanity.

After my Ordination I had the privilege of being attached to our Western Road Community for the first four years of my priesthood. It was a Community of very varying ages, and of all sorts of gifts. It was also a place where one constantly met returning Missionaries, in those days mainly from South Africa, New Guinea and Indonesia, with the mission to Venezuela just starting off. That too was where departing Missionaries received their Mission Crosses in a special ceremony in which they were missioned to go and spread the good news, to bring the Gospel to distant parts. All of this sprang from a simple foundation by Fr. Tierney and his companions who put their trust in God and allowed him to guide them.

It was also a time of realising that we all had shortcomings, and nobody was perfect, and the real success, then, as now, was acknowledging that, and making allowances for that. If we knew all about those who established the first Missionary of the Sacred Heart foundation in Cork in 1909, we would realise that they hadn't a constant halo over their heads, but they had a deep faith, and a deep trust in God's faithfulness.

It is very encouraging and consoling to see how genuine goodness bears such fruit in life, and what is of real value has lasting qualities. What is negative gets lost along the way, and what is life-giving continues to nourish, to support, and to give hope. It is obvious that part of the goodness of the first Missionaries of the Sacred Heart in Cork was their warm humanity, and they very quickly established a great rapport with the local people. That friendly relationship is something very precious that has continued down through the years, as we take heart from that guarantee of Jesus that we are not merely his servants but his friends.

As Missionaries of the Sacred Heart we are privileged to share not just the support and the collaboration of so many people, but also their love and friendship - that is the greatest support we receive - something there in all the circumstances of life.

When I was in the Cork Community some of the older members of the Community would have known Fr. Tierney and would have worked with him, and so there was a very direct line back to the early foundations in Ireland, and through Fr. Tierney to Fr. Chevalier and the early foundations of the Society.

Today we celebrate the faith of this congregation, with a spirit of gratitude for 100 years of a Gospel of love lived, shared, and brought to many corners of the world. The many mission areas and ministries represented here today highlight the great blessings of the 100 years we celebrate. As we assemble we are conscious too of the Ireland in which we

gather, and we haven't yet figured out how to cope without George Lee on our television screens reminding us of the financial mess we are in. We are conscious of bubbles bursting, of Celtic tigers going to their reward, of many people struggling, of struggles and scandals in Church and State, of dishonest dealings at the highest levels in society, of people feeling let down by those from whom they had a right to expect better.

Fr. Jules Chevalier, founder of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, was deeply moved by the evils that afflicted the people of his time. In No. 3 of the Constitutions of the Society we read: "As he contemplated the Heart of Christ, in whom is revealed the compassionate love of the Father, he discovered there the remedy for the ills of the world. Inspired by that love and guided by the Holy Spirit, he founded within the Church the Society of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart."

It was through that Society that Fr. Michael Tierney and his companions came to realise the full significance of the words in the first Reading of our Mass - "If the Lord has set his heart on you, and chose you - know then that the Lord your God is God indeed, the faithful God who is true to his covenant and his graciousness for a thousand generations". That faithful God who never abandons us is the God in whom we believe. That faithful God is the God who has set his heart on us, who has chosen us, and whose love has no end. Our celebration today is especially one of thanksgiving, and each of us has reason to say to so many, what Paul said to the Corinthians: "I never stop thanking God for all the graces you have received through Jesus Christ - God by calling you has joined you to his Son Jesus Christ and God is faithful --".

That faithful God sent his Son Jesus Christ amongst us, constantly reminding us to love one another, constantly showing us love to be people of hope in all the circumstances of life, showing us how to forgive and be forgiven, showing us how to be a presence which radiates peace by the witness of our lives.

We celebrate as an M.S.C. family, both priests and brothers. We celebrate with our sister congregation, Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart, who have been so much part of our communities for many decades of the past century, without whose dedication simply surviving would have been so much more difficult at times. We celebrate with fellow religious, male and female, with whom we have been associated over the years. We celebrate with fellow priests, secular and religious, with whom we share a common ministry. We celebrate with all of you gathered here with whom we are associated, collaborating in bringing the Gospel of hope and of love to the world.

It is not a triumphalist celebration - no Church celebration is or can be - but it is one in which we take pride in our family - in those who still hear that invitation to go to foreign parts as missionaries to spread the good news, and who respond with generosity, in those who work in schools and parishes in England, Ireland and the U.S., in those who work in Retreat and Mission giving, those who work in specialized ministries and communities, in the ministry of vocation promotion, in those who work in the ministry of mission support and those who serve in the ministry of leadership, in all those with whom we collaborate in our ministries who give meaning to our very existence.

We look forward too to another very special celebration in this centenary year. On the 29<sup>th</sup> of May a young Missionary of the Sacred Heart from Cork city - Alan Neville - the

Deacon at our Mass today, will be ordained priest in Sacred Heart Church, Western Road, and we couldn't have any better or more grace-filled centenary celebration than that.

May we never stop thanking God for all the graces we have received, and may we never forget the promise of Jesus - "know that I am with you always, to the end of time". In the words of our motto "go dtugtar grá san uile ait do Chroí Ró Naofa Iosa - "may the Sacred Heart of Jesus be everywhere loved", and may you all experience that love in a special way in this celebration of gratitude and trust.

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