

40th anniversary of the Blessed Sacrament Shrine in Liverpool

Background - When the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament was founded by St. Peter Julian Eymard in 1856, his desire was that there should be a foundation in London. Perceiving that the Holy Eucharist has a power to bring renewal to both the Church and society he declared that the work of his newly founded eucharistic congregation should spread beyond the four corners of Paris to every corner of the world. His dream of opening a community in Britain would come to birth in 1935 when the Congregation opened its doors in Leicester. The city-centre Shrine's that have ministered to Liverpoolsians since 1972 are buildings that perfectly reflect St. Peter Julian's desire for the proclamation of the reign of God in the Holy Eucharist in the midst of daily life. Beginning at Clayton Square and then relocating to Dawson Street forty-years ago, Blessed Sacrament priests and brothers have joined many volunteers to minister to those who find themselves in Liverpool's commercial centre.



There is a popular saying in this part of the world designed to bring encouragement to the advancement of years: 'Life begins at forty!' That statement was repeated recently here in Liverpool as the Blessed Sacrament Shrine celebrated its fortieth anniversary on its Dawson Street site. As the SSS Eymardian family, Shrine volunteers and members of the faithful who have made their home here gathered on the evening of Friday October 17th, we all experienced something of the spirit of gratitude for our former Superior General Fr. Roland Huot SSS whose imagination led to the transformation of the city's furniture warehouse into a new Blessed Sacrament Shrine in 1985.

The celebration was also given the flavour of a personal history, as we welcomed Liverpool's new Archbishop, John Sherrington. The Archbishop shared that during his childhood he grew up in the Blessed Sacrament parish in Leicester, the first foundation in the U.K., and that sometimes his grandparents would take him for perpetual adoration on Sunday afternoons. He recalled as a small child the enormous monstrance that beautifully accommodated the sacred Host and was delighted to be told that the monstrance in the sanctuary where he celebrated the Eucharist was the same one. It was like a coming home.

As part of his homily, Archbishop John shared: "The Shrine has been a house of prayer and devotion for the people of Liverpool, a place of confession, of Mass and of adoration. How

many prayers have been whispered in this church?... Today as we celebrate this anniversary, we pray for a renewed love for Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, service of the weakest in society and the work of spreading the good news of Christ who loved each one of us and gave his life so that we might be his friends and follow Him on the highway to heaven.”

In my own words of thanksgiving I stressed the importance of our recognition that each of us are like living bricks, called upon to make sacrifices to make the Shrine a living building accommodating the full life of the Cenacle:



“Amongst us tonight we have the faces and lives of our volunteers- who from the basement upwards- undertake all of those tasks that make the Shrine a living and functioning building in the centre of the city. The offering of your time and love is a witness to a response of the love you have experienced and received in Jesus Christ eucharistic. The Shrine faithful who make-up the community of faith day in, day out, are precisely those who St. Peter Julian made many sacrifices in the founding of the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament with its focus of ministering in city centre Shrines.”

We know that ‘forty’ is a significant number in scripture. However, our recent experience of celebrating this anniversary will bring graces and encouragement as we continue into forty-one, forty-two...

Father Darren Maslen, sss
Local Superior