



**Bishop Niall Coll's Homily at Mass for the Annual Legion of Mary Pilgrimage
to Knock Shrine, 27 September 2026 at 3 pm**

Frank Duff saw something that the Church had sometimes forgotten. He saw that baptism is not simply something we receive. It is a calling.

In 1922, in an ordinary room in Dublin, Frank Duff gathered a small group of Catholics who wanted to deepen their prayer and serve those most in need. From that small beginning came the Legion of Mary, a movement that would spread throughout the world.

But Frank Duff's greatest achievement was not founding an organisation. It was the vision of the Church that lay behind it.

He believed that ordinary men and women, through baptism, had a real part to play in the mission of Christ. He believed that prayer should lead to service. He believed that devotion to Our Lady should lead us more deeply into the life of her Son. And he believed that when ordinary people allow Christ to work through them, extraordinary things can happen.

In that sense, Frank Duff was ahead of his time. Decades before the Church began speaking so much about synodality, he was already putting into practice something very close to its heart: that the Church is not simply something we receive from others, but something in which all the baptised share. We walk together. We pray together. We listen to one another. We discern together. And we share in the mission of Christ.

That vision is already there in today's second reading. St Paul says: "Be united in your convictions and united in your love, with a common purpose and a common mind." And then he goes deeper: "In your minds you must be the same as Christ Jesus."

That, I think, is the heart of Frank Duff's vision. Not simply that we should do good things. Not simply that we should keep an organisation going. Not even simply that we should work together. But that our minds and hearts should gradually become like the mind and heart of Christ.

Because when that happens, everything changes. We begin to look at people differently. We begin to see the person who is lonely, the person who has lost faith, the person who is struggling, the person who is homeless, the person who has been forgotten.

We stop asking, "What do I get from this?" And begin asking, "What does this person need?" That is what St Paul means when he says: "Let nobody think of his own interests first but everybody thinks of other people's interests instead." That is not easy.

We live in a world that constantly tells us to put ourselves first. Protect yourself. Promote yourself. Make your voice heard. Look after your own interests. St Paul gives us another way. The way of Christ. And Frank Duff understood that this way of Christ could not be left to priests and religious alone.

Every baptised person has a vocation. Every baptised person has gifts. Every baptised person has a part to play in the mission of Christ. That was a remarkable conviction in 1922. And it remains remarkable today.

The Legion was never simply about getting people to do more things. At its heart was the formation of disciples. Prayer came first. The Word of God. The Eucharist. The Rosary. Devotion to Our Lady. The life of grace.

And then, from that prayer, came service. The Legionary went out to the home, the hospital, the prison, the person who was forgotten or neglected. The Legionary welcomed the homeless to the hostel.

Prayer led to mission. And mission always led back to prayer. Perhaps that is something we need to hear again today.

The Church does not need people who are simply busy. It needs people who are becoming like Christ. People whose prayer changes the way they see others. People whose faith changes the way they live. People who can bring the presence of Christ into places where Christ is no longer recognised.

And perhaps there is nowhere better to hear that than here in Knock. Mary stands here in silence. She does not draw attention to herself. She points beyond herself to Christ. That is why devotion to Mary can never be an end in itself. Mary always leads us to her Son.

And the closer we come to Christ, the more we become like the woman who stood beneath the cross, who waited in hope, who received the Spirit and who gave herself completely to the mission of God. That is the Marian spirit Frank Duff wanted the Legion to embody. And it is why his vision still has something important to say to the Irish Church.

We are living through a time of profound change. Many people have drifted from faith. Some have lost trust in the Church. Many young people have little connection with the Gospel. We cannot simply wish ourselves back into another time. But neither should we imagine that renewal will come simply from new programmes, new structures or new plans.

Renewal begins in people. It begins when baptised men and women discover again who they are. When prayer becomes real. When faith becomes visible in the way we live. When ordinary Catholics stop seeing themselves as spectators and begin to recognise that they are participants in the mission of Christ. That was Frank Duff's conviction.

And perhaps today the question for us is not simply: "What can we do for the Legion?" It is a deeper question: "Is the mind of Christ becoming our mind?" Do we seek unity or do we hold on to our own way? Do we serve or do we need to be recognised? Do we make room for others? Can we listen? Can we work with people who are different from us? Do we see the person in front of us as someone to be loved, rather than someone to be judged?

And when our prayer here today is finished and we leave this shrine, will anything be different because we have been here? That is the challenge.

Frank Duff did not set out simply to create an organisation that would survive.

He wanted to form disciples. Men and women whose lives would be shaped by Christ. Men and women who would pray deeply, serve generously and live humbly. Men and women who would understand that the mission of the Church belongs to all the baptised.

That vision began in a small room in Dublin. It has travelled across the world. And today it brings us here to Knock.

So perhaps the most fitting prayer we can make here is a very simple one. Not:

“Mary, make the Church successful.” But: “Mary, make us more like your Son.”

Give us his mind. Give us his humility. Give us his compassion. Give us his courage.

And then send us out.

Because if we truly allow Christ to form our minds and hearts, we will not need to ask whether the Church can be renewed. We will become part of that renewal. “In your minds you must be the same as Christ Jesus.”

May those words shape the way we pray, the way we serve and the way we live.

And through the intercession of Our Lady, may the Legion of Mary continue to do what Frank Duff dreamed it would do: bring ordinary people closer to Christ and bring Christ closer to the world. Amen

+ Niall Coll

Bishop of Raphoe