



Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time C October 13, 2019

Canonization of Cardinal John Henry Newman, Oxford Professor and one of the most famous converts to Catholicism

This Sunday in Rome, John Henry Newman and four others will be raised to the altars of Sainthood in our church family. You may or may not be familiar with this famous theologian, spiritual author, hymn writer and University Chaplain (Newman Centers at Catholic universities). His decision as an Anglican priest to enter into full communion with the Catholic Church in 1845 shocked the Church of England. The following bits and pieces about Newman's life are excerpted from articles on the internet.

Backdrop: Persecution of Catholics in England

For generations after the Reformation, the Penal Laws intended to destroy Catholicism were very successful. For generations, priests in England had to work in secret, lest they be punished by imprisonment or even death. For generations, Catholics were prohibited from entering either the legal or medical profession, and were barred from all offices of state. For generations, Catholic families could not even send their sons to Oxford or Cambridge. Not until 1829 were Catholics allowed to vote. (To this day, a Catholic may not succeed to the throne, nor may anyone married to a Catholic.)

Centuries of official oppression had, by the mid-nineteenth century, left the Catholic remnant in England a small band, held in contempt, scorned and distrusted by the majority. Then a shocking thing happened. The Reverend John Henry Newman—a writer unsurpassed in style and clarity, a preacher of unparalleled power and grace—the most famous and, perhaps, the most influential Anglican minister in all of England, *did the unthinkable: he joined the Roman Catholic Church.*

In 1851, Pope Pius IX restored the English hierarchy after a lapse of three centuries.

Early years. In his youth, Newman himself would have thought it unthinkable to join the Catholic Church. Born in 1801, he was the eldest son of a nominally Anglican father and an evangelical Anglican mother. From them,

and from their society, words like “Romanism” and “Popery” passed easily into his vocabulary, terms of disgust and dismay.

Shy and studious from his earliest days, Newman was blessed with the rare combination of keenest intellect and greatest heart. When he went up to Trinity College, Oxford, his teachers were delighted with a pupil of such prodigious capability who showed so much promise. After taking his degree at Trinity, he won a coveted and prestigious Fellowship at Oriel College, in 1822.

Ordained an Anglican Priest

In 1825, Newman was ordained a priest in the Anglican Church which led to pastoral duties as well as scholarly work. For years as a deacon he did parish work among the poor at St. Clement's near Oxford; his ordination as an Anglican priest brought him charge of St. Mary's, the Oxford university church, from whose pulpit he gained his wide reputation as a great preacher. Decades later, men in their old age would still recall the magnetic effect Newman had had on his hearers in their youth, how he had both lifted their minds and stirred their hearts, as no one else had.

Steps that eventually led into the Catholic Church even as he continued to remain anti-Catholic

During this time, Newman began to study early Church history and especially the teachings of the Early Church Fathers. He discovered many doctrines taught in the ancient Church, especially the sacramental system and apostolic succession, which had been largely abandoned among Anglicans. [If you ever tune in to *The Journey Home* program on EWTN on Mondays at 8:00pm, you will see that the study of the Early Church Fathers was a key reason for many non-Catholics—including ordained ministers—journeying home to Rome.] This was also true for Newman. But for Newman, the journey to Rome was long and arduous. Around this time, he wrote his most famous hymn *Lead, Kindly Light.*

The Oxford Movement. Founded in 1843, this movement, made up of a group of influential Anglicans, sought to return to the Church of England many Catholic beliefs and liturgical practices that were lost to the Church after the English Reformation. Newman became the movement's greatest spokesman and writer.

Newman and his colleagues developed a thesis called the *Via Media*, “a middle way” between Protestantism and the Catholic Church, an attempt to avoid the doctrinal heresies of Protestantism and the doctrinal and devotional excesses of Catholicism. It was an effort to restore a Catholic element to the Anglican Church.

Crisis Point. In 1841, Newman wrote an article stating that he believed that the Thirty-nine Articles (the fundamental document of Anglican theology) could be and should be interpreted in a Catholic way. This caused a huge storm in the Anglican Church. Bishops and the Oxford authorities censured Newman and forbade him to write anymore Tracts or articles.

After this, Newman retired from an active role in ministry and resigned his post at St. Mary’s. He and some of his colleagues moved from Oxford to a small semi-monastic community at Littlemore. Newman retracted his anti-Catholic beliefs.

On October 9, 1845, Newman was received into the Catholic Church. On that same day, he wrote over thirty letters to relatives, friends, and colleagues, announcing his decision to become a Roman Catholic.

A year after his reception into the Church, Newman was ordained a priest. While studying in Rome, he became acquainted with the life and writings of St. Philip Neri, a sixteenth century priest who founded a society known as the Oratorians. (An oratory is a room or building for prayer.) He made the apostolate of personal ministry paramount in his life, working especially with youths and young adults. He sought to re-establish the “family” atmosphere of the small communities of the ancient Church, and gave both academic and spiritual counseling to those in his care. Newman had already taken that approach in his duties both at Oriel College and at St. Mary’s. So he found in St. Philip a kindred spirit; in the saint’s life, he found a model of life for himself and his colleagues.

1854-1859 - Rector of the newly established Catholic University of Ireland. After the founding of a new Catholic University of Ireland in Dublin, Archbishop Cullen invited Fr. Newman to be its first Rector. During these years, Newman worked very hard to develop the University. It was during these years that he gave a series of lectures that were to become a well-received book called *The Idea of a University*. Due to the lack of support by the bishops, Newman resigned as Rector and returned to his Oratory in Birmingham. (My brother who attended the University of Dublin was married at the Chapel that Newman founded. It was the only time I presided at a Mass with my back to the congregation.)

Defender of the Faith. Over the years, Newman gradually retired from public life. He was heard from only occasionally to defend himself from the accusation that he was considering a return to the Anglican Church. It was an even more serious accusation that brought him back into the limelight.

In a book review, the Rev. Charles Kingsley, an Anglican minister, accused the Catholic clergy of dishonesty, and Newman specifically, of having commended dishonesty among the clergy. Upon objecting to the slander, Newman received only more insults. So he embarked upon a mission to clear his name and that of his fellow priests. He wrote a defense of his life, *Apologia pro Vita Sua* (“An Apology for His Life”), now considered the greatest spiritual autobiography since St. Augustine’s *Confession*, written fifteen centuries before. All England had been awaiting Newman’s reply, and he riveted the nation’s attention to his words by serializing them in newspapers across the country for seven weeks.

Newman’s reputation and stature grew steadily from then on. In further works—especially those defending the Church’s Marian doctrines and devotions, and Papal infallibility—he gained an international reputation as a powerful defender of the faith. His writings of all kinds were widely praised, among Catholic and non-Catholics alike.

Made Cardinal by Pope Leo XIII 1879. During his years as a Catholic theologian and writer, Newman received a lot of pushback from Catholic clergy, including Bishops and Cardinals. When Leo XIII, a great scholar himself, made Fr. Newman a Cardinal in May 1879 during his seventh-ninth year, it was like the highest form of recognition he could receive from the Church for his life’s work. All of England celebrated the honor. For Newman, more than any other person, had turned around England’s view of Catholics and their religion. No more would they be called intellectually inferior or morally depraved, just because they were Catholics. Newman’s personal Coat of Arms upon his elevation to the cardinalate was *Cor ad cor loquitur* which translates as “heart speaks unto heart”.

When Newman was made a Cardinal, he had two requests: (1) that he not be ordained a bishop as was the custom, and (2) that he remain at his Oratory in Birmingham. Both requests were granted.

Cardinal Newman said his last Mass on Christmas 1889 and died the following August. During his life, Newman had many close friendships with men and women. His closest friendship was with Ambrose St. John with whom he shared community for 32 years. His desire was

to be buried in the same grave as his great friend who had died a few years before him. The epitaph on his grave reads “*umbris et imaginibus in veritatem*” (“out of the shadows into the truth”).

Absent Father of Vatican II. John Henry Newman has been called the “absent Father of Vatican II” because his writings on conscience, religious liberty, Scripture, vocation of lay people, relation of Church and State, and other topics were extremely influential in the shaping of the Council’s documents. Although Newman was not always understood or appreciated, he steadfastly preached the Good News by word and example.

Road to Canonization. A file for Newman’s canonization or process was opened in 1958.

In 1991, Newman was proclaimed **Venerable** after a thorough examination of his life by the *Sacred Congregation for the Causes of Saints*. One miracle attributed to Newman’s intercession was needed for him to be beatified. A second miracle would be needed for his canonization

First Miracle. The recipient of the first miracle was Deacon Jack Sullivan from Marshfield, Mass. In 2008, the Congregation of the Saints voted unanimously that the healing of Sullivan’s spinal cord disorder defied all scientific and medical explanation.

Pope Benedict, who had a special affection for Newman, beatified him during his pastoral visit to England in September 2010.

Second Miracle. The recipient of the second miracle was Melissa Villalobos of Chicago. She believes her prayers and “constant dialogue” with Blessed John H. Newman saved her life and the life of her unborn child. (Read more about this miracle on the Internet.)

Prayers by St. John Henry Newman

The following beautiful prayer is sometimes found on the back of memorial cards. It is a lovely morning or evening prayer.

May He support us all the day long,
till the shades lengthen and the evening comes,
and the busy world is hushed,
and the fever of life is over,
and our work is done.
Then in His mercy may He give us a safe lodging,
and a holy rest and peace at the last.

I Have a Mission

God has created me to do Him some definite service.

He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another.

I HAVE A MISSION;

I may never know it in this life but I shall be told it in the next.

I AM A LINK IN A CHAIN,

a bond of connection between persons.

He has not created me for naught.

I shall do good; I shall do his work; I shall be an angel of peace; a preacher of truth in my own place while not intending it, if I do but keep his commandments.

THEREFORE I WILL TRUST HIM.

Whatever I am, I can never be thrown away.

If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve Him.

In perplexity, my perplexity may serve Him.

If I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve Him.

HE DOES NOTHING IN VAIN;

He knows what he is about;

He may take away my friends

He may throw me among strangers

He may make me feel desolate, make my spirits sink, hide my future from me—

Still, HE KNOWS WHAT HE IS ABOUT.

Prayer for a Happy Death

Oh, my Lord and Savior,
support me in that hour in the strong arms
of Your Sacraments, and by the fresh fragrance
of Your consolations.

Let the absolving words be said over me,
and the holy oil sign and seal me,
and Your own Body be my food,
and Your Blood my sprinkling;
and let my sweet Mother Mary breathe on me,
and my Angel whisper peace to me,
and my glorious Saints smile upon me;
that in them all, and through them all,
I may receive the gift of perseverance,
and die as I desire to live,
in Your faith, in Your Church,
in Your service, and in Your love. Amen.

Newman's most famous hymn is *Lead, Kindly Light*, written 12 years before he entered the Catholic Church.

Lead, Kindly Light

Lead, Kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom.
Lead me Thou on!
The night is day, and I am far from home,
Lead Thou me on!
Keep Thou my feet;
I do not ask to see the distant scene;
One step is enough for me.
I was not ever thus,
Now pray'd that Thou shouldst lead me on;
I loved to choose and see my path,
But now lead Thou me on!
I loved the garish day,
And, spite of fears, pride ruled my will:
Remember not past years.
So long Your power hath blest me,
Sure it still will lead me on,
O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent,
Till the night is gone;
And with the morn those angel faces smile
Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile.

Further reading: Google –
Newmanreader.org - Biography: Newman 101

Have a blessed week,

Fr. Sean

Cardinal John Henry Newman

