

St. Joseph's Seminary Opening Mass Homily
Immaculate Conception Seminary Huntington

Most Reverend John O. Barres

September 7, 2019

As we begin the new Seminary year and call on the Holy Spirit to enkindle and illumine our minds, hearts and souls, the Church presents us a rich passage from the 14th Chapter of the Gospel of Luke.

Similar to the Narrow Gate passage from Luke 13 presented to us two weeks ago in the 21st Sunday of Ordinary time, Luke 14 stresses the radical and uncompromising nature of following Jesus Christ.

Just as the Cross of Jesus Christ is the turnstile of the Narrow Gate of Salvation, so too the Cross is the turnstile of the purification, reform and sanctification of the Church in this moment and in every moment of Church history.

And the Cross is the turnstile of your call to a vocation to the priesthood of Jesus Christ. Being configured to the Crucified Christ is critical to being configured to your future reception of the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

Luke 14 speaks of presciently and prudently laying a foundation for the future and your bishops, your rector, your formators and professors always echo that message at the beginning of every seminary year.

Whether you are beginning 1st Theology, 2nd Theology, a Pastoral Year, Third Theology or Fourth Theology, the Holy Spirit is calling you and all of us to deepen and expand the foundation of our vocations.

We are celebrating in the Church this fall a unique sign of the times of the Holy Spirit leading and illuminating the path of the Church through history.

Blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman (1801-1890) will be canonized on October 13, 2019. As we know, he is a unique figure in the history of the Church and potentially a Doctor of the Church. Cardinal Newman offers us his guidance as well as his intercession to help us deepen and expand the foundation of our vocations.

His conversion to Catholicism in 1845 expressed both with his heart and his intellect in *Apologia pro Vita Sua* (1864) was a volcanic moment of 19th Century Church history that has led to so many Catholic conversions in England, in the United States and all over the world in the 20th and 21st centuries.

Newman has often been called the Father of the Second Vatican Council. On the one hand his conversion to the Catholic Church was based on his intellect being “deep in history”, immersed in the past, the writings of the Fathers and the doctrine of Apostolic Succession.

On the other hand, his intellect was immersed in the future. He understood that the Deposit of Faith was complete with the death of the last Apostle but he also knew that the Deposit of Faith could be understood more deeply over time as he expressed in his *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (1845, 1878) and his *Grammar of Assent* (1870).

In addition to being one of the most far-sighted theologians in history, he was a great English language stylist as excerpts from the *Apologia* and *The Idea of a University* (1858) are included in all the major anthologies of English Literature.¹

We are all so grateful for the initiative of your rector Msgr. Peter Vaccari in arranging an exceptional Newman Symposium for November 1st and 2nd. It is a unique opportunity for all of us to go deeper into Newman’s biography, his writings, his interior life and his profound evangelizing influence in history and to make them a part of the expansion of the foundation of our own vocations.

¹ A few parts of this homily draw on Bishop Barres’ April 18, 2019 Chrism Mass homily in the Diocese of Rockville Centre.

Newman's life was a balanced and well-integrated expression of his episcopal motto "Cor ad Cor Loquitur/Heart Speaks to Heart" with "Fides et Ratio/Faith and Reason/Faith seeking understanding."

At a Prayer Vigil on the Eve of Newman's Beatification in Hyde Park (London) on September 18th 2010, Pope Benedict XVI described Cardinal Newman's blend, balance and integration of a great Catholic mind and a great Catholic heart. Pope Benedict writes:

At the end of his life, Newman would describe his life's work as a struggle against the growing tendency to view religion as a purely private and subjective matter, a question of personal opinion. Here is the first lesson we can learn from his life: in our day, when an intellectual and moral relativism threatens to sap the very foundations of our society, Newman reminds us that, as men and women made in the image and likeness of God, we were created to know the truth, to find in that truth our ultimate freedom and the fulfilment of our deepest human aspirations. In a word, we are meant to know Christ, who is himself "the way, and the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6).

Newman's life also teaches us that passion for the truth, intellectual honesty and genuine conversion are costly. The truth that sets us free cannot be kept to ourselves; it calls for testimony, it begs to be heard, and in the end its convincing power comes from itself and not from the human eloquence or arguments in which it may be couched...

Finally, Newman teaches us that if we have accepted the truth of Christ and committed our lives to him, there can be no separation between what we believe and the way we live our lives. Our every thought, word and action must be directed to the glory of God and the spread of his Kingdom. Newman understood this, and was the great champion of the prophetic office of the Christian laity. He saw clearly that we do not so much accept the truth in a purely intellectual act as embrace it in a spiritual dynamic that penetrates to the core of our being. Truth is passed on not merely by formal teaching, important as that is, but also by the witness

of lives lived in integrity, fidelity and holiness; those who live in and by the truth instinctively recognize what is false and, precisely as false, inimical to the beauty and goodness which accompany the splendour of truth, *veritatis splendor*.

Soon to be St. John Henry Cardinal Newman beckons us not to settle for spiritual or intellectual mediocrity sometimes expressed in seminary cynicism and a two-faced lack of sincerity and charity in the halls of Dunwoodie.

He calls us instead to an integrated interior life and pastoral and fraternal charity as our true foundation.

He beckons us to die to ourselves and to rise in holiness through a Holy Spirit driven plan of life for prayer and a relentless and creative spirit of Catholic evangelization.

He tells us that when our hearts speaks deeply to the Heart of Christ, we become capable of speaking heart-to-heart and mind-to-mind to all we serve and to speak humbly and effectively to the existential questions of our day raised in our parishes and raised in the global public square.

Saint John Henry Cardinal Newman beckons us to emerge from the cocoon of lukewarmness and mediocrity and to discover in a new way this year that every breakthrough the Holy Spirit leads us to in our understanding and capacity to contemplate and articulate the Creed, our Catholic Biblical Theology, our Sacramental Theology, our Moral Theology and our Spiritual Theology expands and deepens our vocational foundation and our capacity to serve as future holy and evangelizing parish priests in the wide range of diverse parishes in our dioceses.

It is an essential dimension of our call to holiness and mission, a call that always burns through the vertical and horizontal beams and dimensions of the Cross of Christ.

Mary, Mother of the Church and Mother of Jesus at the Foot of the Cross, pray for us!

Soon to be Saint John Henry Cardinal Newman, pray for us!

