

Newman Canonization Homily

Most Reverend John O. Barres

September 2019

As we call on the Holy Spirit to enkindle and illumine our minds, hearts and souls, the Church presents us the Parable of the Prodigal Son from the 15th Chapter of the Gospel of Luke.

Similar to the Narrow Gate passage from Luke 13 presented to us in the 21st Sunday of Ordinary time, Luke 15 stresses the radical and uncompromising nature of the call to conversion to follow 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 our call to conversion and our experience of the mercy of Jesus Christ. Being configured to the Crucified Christ is critical to being configured to our vocations, our unique mission in the Church to the World, and our call to holiness and mission.

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 our response to the call to conversion.

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

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

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

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*.

In a new Pastoral Letter celebrating the October 13, 2019 Canonization of Cardinal Newman that will be published in the near future, I discuss six lessons from the life and thought of St. Newman:

1)Newman teaches us to Seek the Truth: Precisely by seeking and following the Truth of God rather than himself, Newman grew in holiness.

2)Newman teaches us to Be Prepared to Suffer for the Truth: Newman’s conversion to Catholicism proved an especially challenging cross to bear because of the loss it entailed.

3)Newman teaches us to Share the Truth: His *Apologia pro Vita Sua* (1845) is an example of how he shared his own heart and mind’s experience of Truth

and it has had a volcanic influence on conversions to the Catholic Church in England, in the United States and globally.

4)Newman teaches us to Discover and Integrate in our Minds, Hearts, Consciences and Souls the Objective Truth of Religion:

5)Newman teaches us to Understand the True Meaning of Conscience and its Relationship to Objective Truth: Pope Benedict XVI – “Conscience is both capacity for truth and obedience to the truth which manifests itself to anyone who seeks it with an open heart.”

6)Newman teaches us the Role of Religion in Society and the Public Square: The Fullness of truth needs to impact society’s problems and challenges. Faith and reason together help society.

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 families, our parishes and in the global public square.

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!

,