

# ARCHDIOCESE OF GLASGOW

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CURIAL OFFICES, 196 CLYDE STREET, GLASGOW, G1 4JY  
Telephone 0141-226 5898 - Facsimile 0141-225 2600

**Sunday, 26 September 2010**

**St Michael's Dumbarton**

A week ago today, about this time, Pope Benedict at Cofton Park in Birmingham beatified John Henry Cardinal Newman.

This beatification, an exception to the practice of the present Pope who usually presides only at canonizations, was given as the motive for the acceptance of the invitation of the British Government, acting in the name of the Queen, for the Holy Father to make a State visit to the UK.

We have all benefited as a result – and will benefit further from reflecting on the life of Cardinal Newman.

It was a life lived out in the love of God and in search of the truth.

That search was both academic and practical – Newman studied at Oxford, was a fellow of one of Oxford's distinguished colleges, Oriel, sensed a vocation to the priesthood in the Anglican Church, was ordained and became rector of St Mary's where he conducted a highly successful pastoral ministry in a Church frequented by professors and students.

Already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Newman detected a falling away from faith – a "national apostasy". He analysed the reasons and identified relativism as a cause: a view that every man (and woman) had the capacity and right to establish their own truth which might be based on purely subjective considerations, unchallengeable by reference to objective truth and natural law – that which depends ultimately on the authority of God mediated through the Church and held as revealed by Him.

Newman's study of theology, the history of the Church and the teaching of the Fathers gradually led him – in his search for objective truth – towards the Catholic Church. His attempts to interpret the doctrine and practices of the Anglican Church in a Catholic sense (the Oxford movement – which involved others) were resisted by his colleagues (with a few exceptions) and painful though the parting of friends was, he was received into the Catholic Church by the Passionist priest Blessed Dominic Barbieri. He retired for a while to Littlemore, before studying for the Catholic priesthood in Rome.

In Rome he sought advice about his future, was impressed by the congregation of the Oratory founded by St Philip Neri – the "Second Apostle of Rome" – and was authorised to found the first Oratory in England at Birmingham where he studied, preached, wrote copiously, lived humbly with his Oratorian brethren, and exercised a largely hidden apostolate until Leo XIII made him a Cardinal.

He died an old man, hugely respected, and his thought and example have continued throughout the years to influence many.

His choice of Birmingham, like Glasgow one of the great industrial cities of the Victorian period, was prompted by his concern for the poor.

The Holy Father acknowledged this in his homily: "In Blessed John Henry, that tradition of gentle scholarship, deep human wisdom and profound love for the Lord has borne rich fruit, as a sign of the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit deep within the heart of God's people, bringing forth abundant gifts of holiness."

The Pope might have been echoing St Paul's words to Timothy in our second reading and seeing them fulfilled in Newman: "As a man dedicated to God, you must aim to be saintly and religious, filled with faith and love, patient and gentle... Fight the good fight of the faith and win for yourself the eternal life to which you were called when you made your profession and spoke up for the truth in front of many witnesses."

Cardinal Newman's life was marked by a series of controversies, fights in which he had to defend the truth, the Church and even his own integrity which he did in perhaps his greatest prose work "Apologia pro vita sua." It was the story of his search for the truth and arrival in the harbour of the Catholic Church.

In his greatest poetic work "The Dream of Gerontius" he describes another contest – that which the Christian faces at death. How beautifully does Elgar's music express the final victory when the soul of Gerontius, pierced by the healing glance of God, is gently lowered into the cleansing lake of purgatory to await the dawn of the beatific vision.

Newman's choice of Birmingham – was prompted by his concern for the poor – and the need to offer them the consolations of the faith.

This pastoral commitment was not so much in terms of what we call social care, providing for the poor physically – that was largely beyond his means – it was spiritual – caring for the souls of the poor. "Birmingham people also have souls" he remarked rather acidly to a Monsignor who wanted him to go to Rome to give a retreat!

The Holy Father described his work in these terms: "He lived out that profoundly human vision of priestly ministry in his devoted care for the people of Birmingham during the years that he spent at the Oratory he founded, visiting the sick and the poor, comforting the bereaved, caring for those in prison" and he added: "No wonder that on his death so many thousands of people lined the local streets as his body was taken to its place of burial not half a mile from here (i.e. Cofton Park)".

In today's Gospel we hear the parable of Dives and Lazarus – the neglect by the rich man of the poor man at his door was complete. Of course we have, whenever we can, to address the most basic physical needs of our neighbours – The Society of St Vincent de Paul which yesterday at Carfin celebrated the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the deaths of its patron saints and St Vincent and St

Louise de Marillac his co-operator, knows that, and with your help, addresses those needs. But they never forget, nor should we, that the poor have souls!

All of this has relevance today when I have come to induct your new parish priest Mgr James Clancy – his priesthood is in view; his mission is confirmed.

I would like to conclude my homily by borrowing again from the Holy Father's sermon in which he said that "while it is John Henry Newman's intellectual legacy that has understandably received most attention... I prefer on this occasion to conclude with a brief reflection on his life as a priest, a pastor of souls." And then the Holy Father quoted from one of Newman's own sermons: "Had Angels been your priests, my brethren, they could not have consoled you, sympathised with you, have had compassion on you, felt tenderly for you, and made allowances for you, as we can: they could not have been your patterns and guides, and have led you on from your old selves into a new life, as they can who come from the midst of you."

Mgr Jim comes from the midst of you – is in your midst as your priest, and today receives my confirmation as your pastor and your reception of his ministry with the pledge of your prayerful co-operation and sustained support.

May Newman's motto, the theme of the Holy Father's visit, be your joint pastoral inspiration: Cor ad cor loquitur; the heart speaks to the heart!