

Celebrating the Canonisation of Cardinal John Henry Newman

“Heart speaks unto heart”

*(Newman's motto, reflecting on prayer –
our heart speaking to the heart of God;
God's heart speaking to our heart)*

**“Fear not that
your life will
come to an end.
But rather fear
that it will
never have a
beginning”**



**“To live is to
change. To be
perfect is to
have changed
often.”**

**“Nothing would be done at all,
if a person waited until they could do it so well,
that no one could find fault with it.”**

Born 21st February 1801 ✘ Died 11th August 1890 ✘ Founded a University
✘ Wrote thousands of letters ✘ Doubted ✘ Struggled ✘ Suffered personal
attacks ✘ Had amazing theological & philosophical insights ✘ Ordained
an Anglican Priest aged 23 ✘ Converted to Catholicism aged 44 ✘
Ordained a Catholic Priest aged 46 ✘ Wrote poetry & hymns ✘
Beatified (declared “Blessed”) by Pope Benedict XVI on his visit to
England in September 2010 ✘ Will be Canonised (declared a Saint)
by Pope Francis on 13th October 2019.

When Cardinal Newman died, an estimated 15,000 people lined the streets of Birmingham for his funeral. He was a relatively shy man, quite intellectually focussed. So what was it about him that inspired so many in his own lifetime, and that now means he is being declared a Saint?

His journey of faith. He was brought up as an Anglican, and went to church but did not have a deep faith until - quite suddenly - when he was 15, he found a certainty: in that moment he described his faith as “more certain than that I have hands and feet.” He had a strong sense of the eternal love and mercy of God, and felt called to priesthood. At 23 he became an Anglican Priest, and at that time he was very dismissive and critical of the Catholic Church. For his time as an Anglican he was based in and near Oxford, where he preached at St Mary’s, the church attended by many students and professors.

However, he questioned more and more about the Anglican church, and as he questioned he found himself being treated in quite a hostile way. He studied Catholic theology, especially St Augustine, and he eventually left the Anglican church and became a Catholic. Two years later, aged 46, he became a Catholic priest. Later in his life he wrote “Apologia Pro Vita Sua” (“A defence of one’s life”) in which he explains the doubts, questions and struggles with which he wrestled, sometimes in very raw and personal ways.

So Newman is a Saint for those who struggle, who have doubts and ask questions; his journey in faith is full of personal challenge. Some of his projects failed. He was often heavily and personally criticised. Therefore he is a Saint who you can ask for prayers in situations where you have doubts or face challenges, or when you fail and need to start again.

His intellectual gifts. Cardinal Newman’s writings blend profoundly personal insights with inspiring and academic Theology. It is possible that he will be declared a “Doctor of the Church” because of the brilliance and insight of some of his Theology & Philosophy, especially “The Grammar of Assent” where he wrote ground-breaking reflections on the relationship between faith and logic. He founded a University, in Dublin. But it did not begin like this for Newman; he studied at Oxford and put so much pressure on himself in the last few months that when it came to his final exam he broke down completely, sobbing in the exam room, and barely scraped a pass. There would be far, far too much to write about Newman’s Theology for a short leaflet like this, so consider:

Newman was intellectually brilliant, yet struggled with exam stress and pressure. He is Saint who you can ask for prayers when you feel under pressure.

His preaching. Newman was a rather shy person, in many ways, and yet he preached with incredible eloquence and skill. On one occasion, preaching a lunchtime homily in Oxford, he warned anyone coming that they would need to forego their lunch, as the homily was so “fulsome” - and then preached for an hour and a half! He held listeners’ attention both in what he said and in how he said it.

Newman was quite shy, yet able to have the courage to stand up for what he believed, and to preach. He is a Saint who you can ask for prayers in moments when you need courage, especially courage to overcome shyness when you need to give a presentation, or talk to a group.

His friendships & kindness. Most of Newman's writings are letters to friends; he sustained many powerful friendships in his life. As a Catholic priest he chose to live in a poor, industrial area of Birmingham, "in the midst of the mechanics." During a cholera outbreak he volunteered to help those with this contagious disease. And, aged nearly 90, he went out into the snow to help Catholic women working at Cadbury's to have a prayer room within the factory.

Newman's friendships mattered greatly to him. He is a Saint who you can ask for prayers to sustain your friendships, lived out in kindness and charity.

His prayer. Newman was able to bring his struggles and questions to prayer, and he leaves us with a prayer, *Some definite service*, that is a very powerful reflection on Vocational discernment: the first part is printed below. Newman has also left us two hymns (printed on the next page). *Lead kindly light* was written in thanksgiving after Newman had been seriously ill, and it reflects Newman's own journey – seeing just a step or two in front of him, but trusting, always, in the light of God. It is a poignant and beautiful hymn, often sung at funerals. It was sung on one of the lifeboats leaving the *Titanic* and by a group of miners waiting to be rescued for many days in darkness underground. It is a hymn of hope, trust, grace and gentleness. *Praise to the Holiest* is joyful yet deeply reflective; it also has echoes of the challenges in Newman's life, and his deep sense of God who understands those challenges, because He lived them, in the passion and death on the cross. *Take time to pray these prayers and hymns and ask Cardinal Newman to pray for you, as he is declared a Saint of our church.*

God knows me and calls me by my name. 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 my mission – I never may know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next.

Somehow I am necessary for His purposes.

I have a part in this great work;

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

and serve Him in my calling.

Therefore I will trust Him.

Newman, 1848

Praise to the Holiest in the height

Praise to the Holiest in the height
and in the depth be praise,
in all his words most wonderful,
most sure in all his ways.

O loving wisdom of our God!
When all was sin and shame,
a second Adam to the fight
and to the rescue came.

O wisest love! that flesh and blood
which did in Adam fail,
should strive afresh against the foe,
should strive and should prevail;

And that a higher gift than grace
should flesh and blood refine,
God's presence and his very self,
and Essence all divine.

O generous love! that he who smote
in man for man the foe,
the double agony in man
for man should undergo.

And in the garden secretly
and on the Cross on high,
should teach his brethren, and inspire
to suffer and to die.

Praise to the holiest in the height,
and in the depth be praise,
in all his words most wonderful,
most sure in all his ways.

Lead, Kindly Light

Lead, Kindly Light,
amid the encircling gloom,
Lead Thou me on!
The night is dark,
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 enough for me.

I was not ever thus,
nor 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.

Would you like to know more? There are lots of resources at www.newmananonisation.com. These include many quotes from Newman's writings, and some short videos about different aspects of his life - including one filmed in Oxford with long-time friend of the BCYS, Brenden Thompson

*This little leaflet was produced as a Brentwood Catholic Youth Service resource.
There are many more Youth Ministry resources at www.bcys.net.*