



*A pastoral letter on the Canonisation of Saint John Henry Newman, to
be read at all Masses on Sunday 13th October 2019*

My dear brothers and sisters,

Today, the Church rejoices as John Henry Newman is declared a Saint. We could say that England's newest Saint only lived down the M6 Motorway from us! He saw the beginnings of our Shrewsbury Diocese, and foresaw many of the challenges we face today. John Henry Newman is indeed a Saint very close to us!

In speaking of a 'second spring' for the Catholic Church in this land, Newman looked to the future of our Diocese declaring that the name of Shrewsbury would prove 'as stirring to the heart as the glories England had lost' and he spoke of the saints who would rise from this Diocese. In this Year of Holiness, we have reflected together on how each of us is called to become such a saint. Today, the Church declares with certainty that John Henry Newman has reached this goal and assures us that we can confidently ask his prayers and look to his example.

Newman's life as an Oxford academic and clergyman led him on a remarkable journey into full communion with the Catholic Church. It was a journey he undertook courageously in spite of the formidable obstacles he met in the England of his time. Newman recognised that the truth he found in the Catholic Church had to be followed despite his own personal preferences, and at the price of losing not only his position in society, but all of the precious ties of family and friendship.

His reception into the Catholic Church on 9th October 1845 not only shook his contemporaries, it would eventually lead many to follow him. In this 21st Century, we stand in need of the courage of Cardinal Newman, so we never allow ourselves to settle for the comfortable consensus of opinion around us, nor be intimidated by the ever-growing intolerance of Christianity. Newman's journey gives witness to the words which Saint Paul commends to the young Timothy "If we have died with him, then we shall live with him. If we hold firm, then we shall reign with him. If we disown him, then he will disown us. We may be unfaithful, but he is always faithful for he cannot disown his own self".ⁱ

For Saint John Henry Newman, such faithfulness is to be lived in our ordinary lives. It was in reference to ordinary life that he wrote “I have my mission . . . I have a part in a great work; I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for nothing. 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”.ⁱⁱ This is the path to holiness Newman proposes, found in our ordinary duties. Let us listen to his words, “It is a saying of holy men that, if we wish to be perfect, we have nothing more to do than to perform the duties of the day well”.ⁱⁱⁱ Yes, it is in the daily prayer and work of our lives that our path to holiness is found.

Yet, this path is made possible by the Holy Eucharist because in the Mass “the lives of the faithful, their praise, sufferings, prayer and work, are united with those of Christ and with his total offering, and so acquire a new value”.^{iv} From his entry into the Catholic Church, Newman grew in wonder at the real and living presence of Jesus Christ in the Sacrifice and Sacrament of the Eucharist. Like the leper in the Gospel who found himself cured, Newman recognised in this Blessed Sacrament the same Jesus, “present here as God and man, in soul and body and true flesh and blood . . . who called the Twelve, wrought miracles and spoke words of wisdom and peace”.^v In times when the reality of the Eucharist has tragically faded in many minds and hearts, this new Saint of the Church leads us to Him who is the Source of grace, that we too might “fall at the feet of Jesus” and thank Him.^{vi} It is to the Altar and Tabernacle that this Saint for our time will surely lead us with renewed faith that we may pray, as he himself prayed, “I praise, and bless, and give myself wholly to Him, who is the true Bread of my soul, and my everlasting joy”.^{vii}

May Saint John Henry Newman pray for us and accompany us on the path to holiness.

+ Mark

Bishop of Shrewsbury

i 2 Tim. 2: 12,13

ii Meditations on Christian Doctrine 1

iii A Short Road to Perfection

iv Catechism of the Catholic Church n. 1368

v A Short Visit to the Blessed Sacrament

vi Lk. 17: 16

vii Ibid