

September 2010

Dear friend of the missions!

This is the month that brings back a lot of activity. I hope that you all got some down time during the summer. Labor Day is September 6. With unemployment high, we should pray that all people can find meaningful work. There are many feasts in this month that support and sustain our faith and our ministry. September 8 is feast of the Nativity of Mary; September 14 is the Triumph of the Cross; September 15 is Our Lady of Sorrows; September 17 is the Stigmata of St. Francis, and September 29 is the Archangels: Michael, Gabriel and Raphael. The calendar also includes September 12 as the memorial of the Holy Name of Mary. St. Peter Claver (Sept 9), the Korean Martyrs (Sept 20) and St. Lawrence Ruiz and companions (Sept 28) remind us of the missions and all the men and women who minister as missionaries. Please keep them in your prayers. Besides praying for our missionaries, offer a prayer for those students, teachers and administrators who will begin a new school year. This September is the ninth anniversary of 9/11. The event still has a profound affect on us all. Pray also for peace and good will among all peoples. Thank you so much for all your support. Your prayers also make a big difference. Be assured that we are always praying for you and your intentions. Enjoy this and every time of the year! May the Lord give you peace!

(Blessed) John Cardinal Newman

Fr. Russell Becker, OFM

Last year the September meditation was on Cardinal Cooke; this year another cardinal. Pope Benedict will beatify Cardinal Newman on September 19, during the papal visit to Great Britain. Cardinal Newman is a great theologian, spiritual writer and poet who came into the full communion of the Catholic Church from the Anglican Communion. Almost all of his life was dedicated to education. He lectured at Oxford, tried to help found a Catholic university in Dublin (he was more successful than he seemed in his own time, it still exists) and wished that all people were given the benefit of a good education. His work as an educator was not just lecturing on topics and writing, but also preaching and reaching out to his students to support their spiritual lives. At most non-Catholic colleges, the Catholic ministry to students, faculty and staff is known as the Newman Center, named after the cardinal, who gave his life to educating young people. There will be a lot of material available concerning Cardinal Newman. So I will only give a few dates and spend some time on his writings..

John Henry Newman was born on 21 February 1801 and was baptized in the Anglican Church. He was a part of the more evangelical branch of the Church and was ordained a priest on 29 May 1825. He worked for a little while in parishes but spent many years at Oxford. During that time his study, drew him into greater sympathy with those of the Anglican Church who were trying to recover their Tradition that was rooted in the scriptures and the Patristic era. He was a dedicated member of the Oxford Movement which worked to deepen the influence of the Tradition and help the Anglican Church recover its Catholic roots. His study also brought him closer to the Roman Catholic Church and he "crossed the Tiber" on 9 October 1845. He was ordained a Catholic priest on 30 May 1847. Newman was attracted to the spirituality of St. Philip Neri, he became an Oratorian, and returned to England, founding several Oratories, the most famous in Birmingham. He continued to teach, preach and write. His writing often seemed to rile people and for a long time he was "under a cloud" because of his misunderstood views of the laity in the Church and the development of doctrine. His vindication came when Pope Leo XIII named him a cardinal on 12 May 1879. Newman died on 11 August 1890. His theology and spirituality are interesting, and he is often quoted by others. Many claim him as an influence including St. Edith Stein and Pope Benedict XVI. The feast day of Blessed John Henry Newman will be on 9 October, the day he was received into the full communion of the Catholic Church.

Poet and spiritual writer. Newman's prayers had the touch of a poet (examples will follow). The following prayers are acts of faith and trust in God that Newman composed. It may encourage us to discover how to place our faith and trust in God in our lives and discover our mission.:

One of Newman's most famous poems,
part of a larger work: *Lyrica Apostolica*.

**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 Thy power has blest me, sure it still
Will lead me on,
O'er the 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.**

God created me to do him some definitive service. He has committed some work to me which he has not committed to another. I have my mission. I may never know it in this life, but I shall be told it in the next. I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. God 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. Therefore, I trust him, wherever I am. I can never be thrown away. If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve him, in perplexity, my perplexity may serve him. If I am in sorrow, my sorrow may serve him. God does nothing in vain. He knows what he is about. He may take away my friends. He may throw me among strangers. He may make me feel desolate, make my spirits sink, hide my future from me. Still he knows what he is about.

Here is another simple, Catholic act of faith and commitment to mission:

O my Lord Jesus, low as I am in your all-holy sight, I am strong in you, strong in your Immaculate Mother, through your saints and thus I can do much for the Church, for the world, for all I love.

Development of Doctrine. Newman was sure that in the eternal realm God was constant. At the same time, he was convinced that doctrine developed because each age had a difference perspective and experience of God. I suppose it can be understood a bit if you consider the Mystery of God as a diamond. The diamond has many facets. How it appears depends on the way it is observed. Each perspective gives a view of the diamond but it is almost impossible to have a complete perspective on the diamond. So with the Mystery of God. Individuals and groups in every age engage the Mystery. Each will observe it a little differently, not that the Mystery changes, but the those who engage the Mystery do so as people influenced by their education, experience, successes and failures to name a few. So while Newman was absolutely certain of the unchangeableness of eternal truths, he was also certain that the way they are experienced and expressed changes all the time. The Tradition is alive and continually seeks new ways to express what is experienced. *Creeds and dogmas live in the one idea which they are designed to express, and which alone is substantive; and are necessary only because the human mind cannot reflect upon it, except piecemeal, cannot use it in its oneness and entirety, nor without resolving it into a series of aspects and relations...and thus the Catholic Dogmas are, after all, but symbols of a divine fact, which, far from being compassed by those very propositions, would not be exhausted, nor fathomed by a thousand* [Sermons].

If Christianity be an universal religion, suited not simply to one locality or period, but to all times and places, it cannot but vary in its relations and dealings towards the world around it, that is, it will develop. In a higher world it is otherwise, but here below to be perfect is to have changed often [Essay on the Development of Doctrine].

This understanding can serve both the Church and individuals very well. We continue to grow in knowledge and experience of God. The Mystery is truly inexhaustible. See how his experience of change gave him a perspective important for our times.

On the laity. Newman's views on the laity were often misrepresented and misunderstood. But he never pulled back from his reminder that the Church is both hierarchy (teachers) and laity (the taught). Both are important to the Church. His thought came to fruition in Vatican II where the Church was recognized as the People of God—a more inclusive image. It was his study of the early Church that convinced him of the importance of the laity. It was the lay faithful that preserved and passed on the Orthodox faith at a time when many of the bishops had become Arians. For Newman, the laity witnesses to the Truth and teaches others by this witness. Their sense and dignity begun in baptism and nourished through Word and Sacrament is an important compliment to the teachers of the Church. In his Sermons, Newman articulated what the truly devout Christians are to the Church: they live according to the Bible, they look to Christ and not the trappings of the world, they are people of prayer, they lack worldly ties and have a true eschatological attitude, and that their hearts are filled with joy because they know they live in the presence of Christ. Why would someone be “under a cloud” because they encouraged the Church this way?

Newman had many chances in life and perhaps as a last word, could encourage us to see all the chances we have in God: *In truth, we are not called once only, but many times; all through our life Christ is calling us. He called us first in baptism; but afterwards also; whether we obey his voice or not, he graciously calls us still. If we fall from our baptism, he calls us to repent; if we are striving to fulfill our calling, he calls us on from grace to grace, and from holiness to holiness, while life is given us.... He calls us again and again, in order to justify us again and again, and again and again, and more and more, to sanctify and glorify us. It were well if we understood this; but we are slow to master the great truth, that Christ is, as it were, walking among us, and by his hand, or eye, or voice, bidding us to follow him. We do not understand that his call is a things which takes place now. We think it took place in the Apostles' days; but we do not believe in it, we do not look out for it in our own case* [Parochial Sermons].

Questions for Reflection

1. What kind of confidence do we have in God's plan for us?
2. How do we continue to learn more about God and share our discovered insights and perceptions with one another?
3. How do we cope with change? Do we see it as a developing and deepening understanding of the Mystery of God?
4. What are the implications of the image of the Church as the People of God for your life? What is truly the mission of the laity?
5. Rejoice in the fact that God does not give up on us: chance after chance.

The following poem has become a beautiful hymn used in many Churches:

**Praise to the Holiest in the height,
And in the depths 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 their foe,
Should strive and should prevail.**

**And 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 a cross on high,
Should teach His brethren and inspire
To suffer and to die.**

Please pray for our missionaries on their birthdays:

**Fr. Patrick Tuttle, O.F.M. (Home Missions): September 4
Fr. Clement Comesky, O.F.M.. (Bolivia): September 25
Fr. Ignatius McGeedy, O.F.M.. (Brazil): September 29**

May God give them many years of health, peace and energy!

Also remember our missionaries and former missionaries who are ill:

**Fr. Aloysius Siracuse, O.F.M. (Brazil)
Fr. Ignatius McGeedy, O.F.M. (Brazil)
Fr. Peter Sheridan, O.F.M. (Home Missions)
Fr. Boniface Hanley, O.F.M. (Bolivia)
Fr. Stanislaus Widomski, O.F.M. (Japan)
Fr. Finian Riley, O.F.M. (Africa)
Fr. Robert Nee, O.F.M. (Brazil)**

May God grant them health and peace!