

ARCHBISHOP'S HOUSE,
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**Pastoral Letter for the 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time
29 September 2019**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ,

In two weeks' time, Blessed John Henry Newman will be declared a saint of the Church. This is a joyful moment, indeed. The life of this great English figure of nineteenth-century Church life is held before us as a model to follow. It is good to remember that he lived in Ealing and is, therefore, a native of our Diocese, and was first taken to Mass as a young boy in Our Lady of the Assumption, Warwick Street. Do try to follow the events that will take place in Rome on 13th October and the celebrations taking place here in our Diocese the following weekend.

One of the most important aspects of his life is the long and difficult journey he made into the fullness of faith in the Catholic Church. It cost him dearly. Yet it is an essential part of his witness. His search for truth led him to examine in detail the foundations of the Catholic faith in the history of the Church. It also drove him to look closely at his own experiences, and feelings, sensing in them the call and promptings of God. He was utterly convinced that in all our experiences in this world, there is a sign, a shadow, an impression, like a fingerprint, of the presence of God. This conviction made him a wonderful witness to the nature, importance, and experience of the Catholic faith.

Providentially, this coming month of October has been designated by Pope Francis as an 'Extraordinary Month of Mission'. For this, Cardinal Newman is a good patron. Pope Francis invites us to renew our sense of mission, our task of bringing the Gospel to life so that others may see it and come to share its joy. He often reminds us that we are 'missionary disciples'. Through baptism we share in the task given by God the Father to His Son, Jesus, to bring His truth, love, compassion, and forgiveness into this world. There is a lovely saying: 'It is not that the Church of God has a mission, but that the mission of God has a Church!' We are that Church, and God gives us our mission.

What does this mean?

One response is in the Reading we have just heard from the First Letter of St Paul to his companion Timothy: try to live lives filled with faith, love, patience, and gentleness; fight the good fight; speak up for the truth in front of others. St Paul goes on to say that in fulfilling this duty we give honour to God, 'the blessed and only ruler of all' (1 Timothy 6:11-16). This is the pathway of the missionary disciple.

Another response to the call of Pope Francis is that we become more aware of the potential we have for bringing the loveliness of our faith, and its joy and consolation, to the attention of others. Personal conversations, individual acts of kindness, having compassion for others in their trials, offering to pray for those in need, whoever they may be: all these are steps in our missionary activity.

Included in this missionary activity is a readiness to support more formal or organised works of spreading the Gospel, at home or in other countries. The Holy Father encourages this as well.

Readiness to give a deliberate yet measured witness to our faith first requires us to be deeply rooted in faith. This we do through the rhythms of prayer and reflection in our lives, just as Cardinal Newman did in his.

To help in this, the Bishops of England and Wales are launching a time of special focus on the role of the Holy Scriptures in our lives. This initiative has the title 'The God Who Speaks'. It runs from now until the end of 2020. In order to share the Good News of Jesus with others, we must be immersed in His Word, His Wisdom, and His Peace. This we do through praying over and pondering on the words of the Bible. In the coming months this venture will unfold in your parishes and, I know, will offer real help.

Cardinal Newman faced difficult times and circumstances. So do we. At this moment, there is much unease in our society. We seem to have lost a sense of shared hope and vision around which to gather. Our present-day culture offers no reason or encouragement to offer forgiveness to those who have offended. A harshness of speech and a quickness of condemnation seem to be everywhere. This is the society in which we are to give our witness, and for which we readily offer our prayer. Let us never lose heart in doing so!

In the light of today's Gospel, we do well to remember another constant feature in the life of our new saint. From his earliest years as a young priest of the Church of England, and throughout his time as a Catholic priest, right up to his death at the age of 89, he was unwavering in his care for the poor. For this reason, thousands lined the streets of Birmingham to offer their love and respect to him as his hearse passed by. This care for those facing poverty must be a hallmark of our lives too. It is certainly one of the most eloquent and effective ways of witnessing to our faith that we can give in our society today!

May this rather special month of October 2019 be a blessed time of faith and peace for you all.

Yours devotedly,

+ Vincent Nichols

✠ Cardinal Vincent Nichols
Archbishop of Westminster