

Mass at the Altar of Blessed John Henry Newman

Dear friends,

Introduction

September 19, 2010, was a day of joy for Catholics in England and around the world, for it was the day Pope Benedict XVI beatified the convert, theologian, man of letters, priest, and cardinal, John Henry Newman. It is a privilege for me to return today to this holy place to celebrate Mass at this altar of Blessed John Henry Newman here in the magnificent London Oratory.

The Altar of Blessed John Henry Newman

We see above the altar an image of the famous portrait of Newman by John Everett Millais (mill-LAY), the originals of which were painted soon after Newman's creation as Cardinal Deacon of San Giorgio in Velabro by Pope Leo XIII in 1879. Indeed, such is my own devotion to Blessed John Henry Newman that this same image has been placed in the chapel in my residence, just beside the ambo from which the Scriptures are proclaimed.

Here at *this* altar, beneath the image of Newman, we read the inscription which he directed to be carved on his tombstone upon his death: "Ex umbris et imaginibus in veritatem" - "Out of shadows and images, into truth."

On the front of the altar itself, as on the beautiful altar rail gates, we see Newman's coat of arms, with three hearts, representing the love of the Holy Trinity, and evoking his cardinalatial motto, "Cor ad cor loquitur," "Heart speaks to heart," which he took from the writings of St. Francis de Sales.

Interestingly, the feast day of Blessed John Henry Newman is neither the day of his death (August 11th) or of his birth (February 21st) but rather, it is celebrated on the 9th day of October, the anniversary of his reception into the Catholic Church, to which he memorably referred as “the one true fold of the Redeemer.” So I am sure it is no happenstance that this altar of Blessed John Henry Newman stands so close to the replica of the great bronze statue of St. Peter, the original of which is found in the Vatican Basilica, just steps away from the tomb of the first Pope.

Acts of Faith

Celebrating as we are the season of Advent, preparing our hearts and minds anew for the coming of Christ, we think of Newman’s extensive writings on this very subject. Indeed, Christ’s words to the blind men in today’s Gospel speak of *the necessity of faith* if we are to see the mighty works of God. Newman was utterly insistent on the necessity of making *concrete acts of faith*, because they keep our minds and hearts alert for the coming of Christ.

In a sermon for Advent entitled “Reverence, a Belief in God’s Presence,” Newman very practically and beautifully lists some of them. He says, “...to come often to prayer, is an act of faith; to kneel down instead of sitting, is an act of faith; to strive to attend to your prayers, is an act of faith; to behave in God’s House otherwise than you would in a common room, is an act of faith; to come to it on weekdays as well as Sundays, is an act of faith; to come often to the most Holy Sacrament, is an act of faith; and to be still and reverent during that sacred service, is an act of faith. These are all acts of faith,” he says, “because they all are acts such as we should perform, if we saw and heard Him who *is* present, though with our bodily eyes we see and hear Him *not*. But, ‘blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed.’”

Conclusion

Dear friends, during this privileged season, let it be ours to make concrete acts of faith such as these, so that when Christ comes at Christmas, and when He comes

again in majesty, He may find us watching and ready.

And, finally, let us pray today as the Church prays on the feast day of this, one of the most eloquent exponents of the Gospel in the history of the Church, in these words:

O God, who bestowed on the Priest Blessed John Henry Newman the grace to follow your kindly light and find peace in your Church, graciously grant that, through his intercession and example, we may be led out of shadows and images into the fullness of your truth. Through Christ, our Lord. Amen.