

Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Dear Parishioners,

Recently, in the light of his imminent canonisation, I have been reading a little about John Henry Newman. I am aware that he means a great deal to many of you and that his writings and example played a significant role on your road to full communion with the Catholic Church. It is my hope that on occasion we will turn to Newman to illuminate our exploration of the Creed during our Lent Course. But it is not on Newman I wish to dwell in this brief reflection; only to say that, in reacquainting myself with his life I noticed how, three centuries after the event, the Protestant Reformation continued to traumatise so many inhabitants of our islands well into the 19th century. Certainly, the nailing of the 95 Theses to the door in Wittenberg on Hallow 'Een 1517 was one of the epochal moments in the religious and political history of Europe. Christians are still scrambling to pick up the pieces and anyone even vaguely familiar with the long life of John Henry Newman will appreciate what a painful and challenging endeavour that is. Will the historians of the twenty-third century, provided they have any interest in the topic, look back and see the 21 - 24 February 2019 meeting at the Vatican between Pope Francis and the heads of the world's bishops conferences in the same light?

All the journalists and commentators I have had a chance to read this week - in *The Guardian*, the *Irish Times* or the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (probably the most widely respected broadsheet in the world) - all agree that the crisis in the Catholic Church is comparable to the Reformation. Some would claim worse. While in no position to judge this issue dispassionately nor to forecast the future, it is my view that the events of the summer and the Rome meeting and its aftermath have changed forever the landscape of Catholicism as we know it. Of course, the Church has been in turmoil on various fronts since Vatican II and it can creditably be claimed that the true apostolic leadership given by Pope Paul VI (*Humanae Vitae* remaining still a deeply divisive issue among faithful Catholics) and the steady hand Pope John Paul II, kept on the rudder throughout his exceptionally lengthy pontificate, saved the Church from coming loose of its moorings.

The issue which currently preoccupies all thinking Catholics, the sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable people from within the Church's ranks, and the manner in which the Church has dealt with it, are the source of unprecedented disquiet. Any resolution of the issue itself and any coping with the aftermath will require great vision, courage and a renewed faith in the presence of the risen Lord in and with his Church. What we as a community should do, in my view, is continue together our pilgrimage of faith, maintain our openness to the gospel message, do what Jesus asked of us, and love the Church, remembering that we are as much members of the Church as Pope Francis and the victims of abuse, be they boys, girls, nuns or seminarians. Those bruised and hurt, most of them adults now, are all around us: they may be sitting in the pew next to us. The new beginning starts with us.

Father Patrick