

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Dear Parishioners and friends who visit our parish website,

The canonization of John Henry Newman has received a surprising amount of publicity over the past few weeks. All the British broadsheets covered the liturgy in Rome during which Pope Francis declared Newman a saint. The TV coverage was limited but a friend today sent me a magnificent short film made by Anne Widdicombe (MEP, former MP and government minister, and convert to Catholicism) in which the complexity of the towering intellectual figure that was Newman, the continual clash of ideas in his fertile brain, the conflict of emotions as he sorted out the passionate human emotions which so frequently came to the fore in his personal life, and the twin identities of outcast and hero which were with him right to the end of his long and eventful life were all set in high relief. Anne Widdicombe and her production team have done an excellent job. Here in the parish on last Monday evening Mgr. Michael Sharkey, parish priest in Sonning Common nearby, gave us an excellent lecture on Newman: witty, peppered with fascinating anecdotes and insights into the doctrines of the Church that Newman cared so passionately about and which ultimately led him to become a Catholic and receive ordination as a priest.

Cardinal Newman would be the first to deflect attention from himself and remind us that, even though he has been canonized and scholars are still fascinated by his writings, there are lots of other saints not only in the liturgical calendar but in heaven itself. Even though we may have the impression that JHN hogged the limelight in Rome on Sunday 13 October, Pope Francis did canonize four others from different parts of the world and a number of them drew even larger numbers of pilgrims to St. Peter's Square than came from the UK for Newman's canonization. An infinitesimal number of those who are saints in Heaven have been officially raised to the altars of the Church and been canonized by the Pope.

The vision which John the Evangelist had on Patmos of the "*huge number, impossible to count, of people from every nation, race, tribe and language.*" [Revelation 7, 9] tells us that the number of the redeemed is vastly in excess of those who have been canonised. And on 1st November when we celebrate the Solemnity of All Saints it is not the sum total of those who have been canonized that we are honouring but *all* those in heaven, including people who impacted on our personal lives much more than John Henry Newman, Anthony of Padua or Therese of Lisieux: we may be thinking of our parents, of friends who have left this world before we did, of countless good people who crossed the path of our lives, set us good example, helped us out or inspired us by the quality of their Christian commitment. On 1 - 2 November we pray *for* our deceased friends and relatives but we can also pray *to* them.

Father Patrick