

Sunday Homily - Blessed John Henry Newman by Fr. Paul Check

From today's Gospel: "And the man began his journey home, putting his trust in...Jesus..." In the Name of the Father...

Cor ad cor loquitur. "Heart speaks to heart." I hope you recognize this as the motto of Blessed John Henry Newman, whose first feast day in the Church's liturgical calendar was yesterday, October 9. In a singular moment of his pontificate, Pope Benedict beatified Cardinal Newman during his recent apostolic visit to England, and by doing so, the Holy Father has invited our attention to the life and work of one of the most famous converts in the history of the Catholic Faith...a man whose philosophical and theological mind is arguably without peer in recent centuries... save perhaps for Benedict XVI.

Newman's motto—heart speaks to heart—does not come from Sacred Scripture, but it conveys with such economy and insight the work of the redemption. "No longer do I call you servants," Our Lord said just prior to His Passion, "for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you *friends*, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you." (Jn 15:15) The union in the Holy Spirit of the heart of the Father with the heart of the Son—the communion of love that we inadequately describe as "the Blessed Trinity"—that union produces a superabundance of grace and charity that lifts man from sin and sorrow, and into the company of God, into conversation with God, if we will but give our consent...

This, dear people, is the spirit of Church, the Bride of Christ, and the spirit of the liturgy offered *now* in this sanctuary, where the Son's heart speaks to heart of His Father in the re-presentation of the one sacrifice of Calvary at this Mass...and we are invited to become part of this mystery...to listen and to the extent we can, to understand...but better, to believe, and then to *receive* and to be transformed by divine love...as heart speaks to heart.

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And yet, this transformation does not often happen...or at least not in the measure divine love desires. "These things I have spoken to you," Jesus said before His death, "that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full." (Jn 15:11) "Ask," He continued, "and you will receive, that your joy may be full." (Jn 16:24) We can hear, or should hear, the urgency in those words, that distinctive urgency that only love confides, as one heart speaks to another heart. We know there is no lack in the heart of Christ...where might be the lack in our own?

Cardinal Newman was a great believer in the Divine Providence. He believed that God was fully engaged in this world and fully engaged in the lives of individuals...or to quote my friend, Fr. Cipolla, that nothing is outside the reach of grace. Nothing. If only we could see—with a supernatural vision—the hand of God, the nearness of God, and then measure the importance of events according to eternity...

There is a special group of people—the man in this morning's Gospel who begged Our Lord to heal his son numbers among them—there is a special group of people who understand God *because they have confidence in Him*. Please may I repeat this point: "And the man began his journey home, putting his trust in Jesus." (Jn 4:50) Dear people, I can tell you almost nothing more important than this if you sincerely wish to know the joy of Christ, to please Our Father in Heaven, to live a holy life:

the real friends of God trust God, because they know He is good...because their hearts are close to His.

“Your son will live,” Jesus told the man. (Jn 4:50) Here is a divine promise, in which that man trusted, since his own heart had come into such proximity with the Sacred Heart...and was then transformed by it.

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I had occasion recently to visit the exhibit about the life of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta at the Knight's of Columbus museum in New Haven. I commend it to you, and even more so the example of faith of one of God's best friends of our time. Something in particular struck me and will not leave my mind. In one place, the display recounted the conversation between Our Lord and Mother during which He asked her to begin the great work in the world that would become the Missionaries of Charity. At that moment Jesus said to her, “Fear hurts me.” [repeat] It is not pleasant to think that we could wound the heart of God...but when we do not trust Him, He feels it.

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Perhaps we sometimes hesitate because we know we have betrayed the good God. “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord,” Peter said as he fell at the Master's knees. (Lk 5:8) You recall how the heart of Christ responded so kindly to one that was wavering: “Do not be afraid” (Lk 5:10), and Peter did not depart...and neither did Jesus. Our sins are no match for the charity of the Savior.

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Perhaps suffering weakens our confidence. Understandable...but is not suffering an invitation to bring the Lord's own sacrifice immediately before our eyes: “My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me?” (Mt 27:46) That voice lifted up to Heaven in one instant all of the pain and loss of humanity, gathered into the Heart of the Redeemer...and that voice was graciously and tenderly heard. How can we doubt that we will find safe and peaceful refuge in the breast of the One who gave all for us?

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Blessed Newman offers another explanation for our inconstancy. Seeing plainly into the tangle of the human heart, he warned: “The aim of most men esteemed conscientious and religious, or who are what is called honorable, upright men, is, to all appearance, not how to please God, but how to please themselves without displeasing Him.” [repeat] Newman thought that the faithful who seriously strive for holiness are generally very few in number in the history of the Church. Even good people—Newman said, the “conscientious and religious”—will exchange self-confidence for *Christ confidence* when it comes to the right order of living, by attempting to provide for their own happiness apart from the generosity of God. To this grave mistake, Christ says, “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” (Lk 12:32) And He reminds us two verses later, “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” (Lk 12:34)

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Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, your heart and mine are, in the words of one wise man, “blessedly incomplete.” We are made for communion, but no created good, no human love—no matter how

noble and pure—can satisfy the infinite longing of the human heart...only the heart of God can do this.

Cor ad cor loquitur. Heart speaking to heart. The plan for our redemption is just that, a communication of hearts: from the heart of the Father, to the heart of the Son, to the heart of the Blessed Virgin, to our hearts...and back. We say grace builds on nature, so we can always renew and deepen our trust in the Son by first turning, in such a human way, to the Immaculate Heart of the Mother, our Mother Mary, whose heart beat in perfect harmony with the good God's, from the crib to Calvary, and now into the glory of Heaven.

In the Name...