

St John Henry Newman, Doctor of the Church

On 13 October 2010, in a damp Cofton Park in Birmingham, Pope Benedict XVI declared Cardinal John Henry Newman to be Blessed.

On 19 September 2019, at St Peter's Basilica in Rome, Pope Francis declared him to be a Saint.

On 1 November 2025, at Mass in front of the same Basilica, Pope Leo XIV proclaimed, in Latin, these words:

'We, having obtained the opinions of numerous Brothers in the Episcopate and many of Christ's faithful throughout the world, having consulted the Dicastery for the Causes of Saints, after mature deliberation and with certain knowledge, and by the fullness of the apostolic power, declare Saint John Henry Newman, Doctor of the Church. In the name of the Father and of the Holy Spirit.'

And thus St John Henry Newman, for 40 years a parish priest in Birmingham, become only the third Doctor of the Church from England!

Unexpectedly, I found my eyes filling with tears of gratitude and sheer amazement.

It is difficult to find words to convey the immensity of this moment. We are being told beyond doubt that this man, in his life and all that he wrote, both as a priest of the Church of England and as a Catholic, is a sure guide and teacher of the true faith of the Catholic Church. I rejoice that in a man described as 'an essentially English figure' is to be found, without dissonance or discomfort, a full expression of Catholic faith.

At that moment I also remembered the words of Prince Charles, published on 12 October 2019, that John Henry Newman 'stood for the life of the spirit against the forces that would debase human dignity and human destiny.'

In his homily Pope Leo proclaimed: 'Newman's impressive spiritual and cultural stature will surely serve as an inspiration to new generations whose hearts thirst for the infinite, and who, through research and knowledge, are willing to undertake that journey which, as the ancients said, takes us *per aspera ad astra*, through difficulties to the stars.'

He echoed Prince Charles' words when he also said, quoting Pope Francis, 'that we must work together to set humanity free from the encircling gloom of nihilism, which is perhaps the most dangerous malady of contemporary culture, since it threatens to "cancel" hope.' He continued by quoting the famous words of St John Henry Newman, words that I have sung since childhood: 'Lead Kindly Light'.

Pope Leo said: 'In that beautiful prayer, we come to realise that we are far from home, our feet are unsteady, we cannot interpret clearly the way ahead. Yet none of this impedes us, since we have found our Guide: "Lead, Kindly Light, amid th'encircling gloom, Lead Thou me on;" "Lead, Kindly Light, The night is dark, and I am far from home, Lead Thou me on."'

On that morning not only did we receive this great gift of a new Doctor of the Church, but Pope Leo also declared St John Henry Newman to be the Co-Patron of Catholic Education throughout the world, together with St Thomas Aquinas.

For us, in England, where Catholic education has long been our priority, this is a moment of huge potential renewal. For this reason I am sending this simple reflection to every Catholic school in the Diocese, so that we can all rejoice in this remarkable moment.

The words of Pope Leo are addressed to you:

‘On this solemn occasion, I wish to say to teachers and educational institutions: “Shine today like stars in the world” through your authentic commitment to the collective search for truth and to sharing it with generosity and integrity. Indeed, you do so through your service to young people, especially the poor, and your daily witness to the fact that “Christian love is prophetic: it works miracles” (Apostolic Exhortation *Dilexi Te*, 120).

Then he said: ‘the Lord Jesus is not just one of many teachers, he is the Master *par excellence*. Moreover, he is the Educator *par excellence*. We are his disciples and are in his “school.” We learn how to discover in his life, namely in the path he has travelled, a horizon of meaning capable of shining a light on all forms of knowledge. May our schools and universities always be places of listening to the Gospel and putting it into practice!’

And finally, reminding us of the saying of St John Henry Newman that ‘God has created me to do Him some definite service’ he said:

‘I pray that Catholic education will help each person to discover their own call to holiness. Saint Augustine, whom Saint John Henry Newman greatly admired, once said that we are fellow students who have one Teacher, whose school is on earth and whose chair is in heaven’ (cf. Sermon 292,1).

I came away from St Peter’s on Saturday 1 November 2025 with a depth of emotion which served to strengthen and expand my sense of wonder and promise evoked by the Visit of our King and Queen to Pope Leo just a few days earlier. These are blessed days for us all. Not only do they promise greater cooperation between all the followers of Jesus, but they also refresh in us an urgency about the key role that faith in God must play in our wider society. Today, in the words of Prince Charles in 2019, we urgently need to be able ‘to advocate without accusation, disagree without disrespect, and see difference as a place of encounter rather than exclusion’.

May this new and holy Doctor of the Church, a man of great intellect, of every English sensibility, of broad and courageous pastoral dedication, intercede for us that the Lord may guide us with his kindly light.



✠ Cardinal Vincent Nichols
Archbishop of Westminster

2 November 2025

On 27 October 2025, Pope Leo issued an Apostolic Letter entitled *Drawing New Maps of Hope*. I have attached a short summary of some of its key themes. Please give it your full attention!