



PAPAL VISIT TO THE UK 16th-19th September 2010

Papal Visit UK 2010: The Legacy: Play Your Part In New Mission Era

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93 year old Jean recently struck up a conversation with me. She was in bed preparing to have a pacemaker fitted because her heart was slowly grinding to a halt. Despite her years and physical frailty her eyes sparkled with life and a desire to live and contribute to the well-being of her family and friends. Jean knew and knows that her life had a definite purpose and she was ready to embrace it as a new chapter in her life unfolded.

Blessed John Henry Newman also understood this fundamental truth. He wrote: 'God has created me to do Him some definite service. He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have mission... I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons, He has not created me for naught, I shall do good.' These words apply to each one of us. As memories of the Pope's Visit begin to be a little less bright, it's important to be challenged to consider what has changed in our lives and in the lives of our parishes? How have we embraced afresh our mission to do good where we find ourselves? What one thing have we done or said to be renewed in our Christian witness in daily and parish life?

The last year in the life of the Church in the UK has been unprecedented and seen an enormous outpouring of graces. In September and October 2009 the relics of the Patroness of the Missions, St Thérèse of Lisieux, visited our Isles. One year later, His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI, visited the UK, beatifying Cardinal Newman whilst he was with us. It begs the question, what next for the autumn 2011 (one person half-joked with me recently, 'Is Our Lord coming next autumn?') These events happened not long before the announcement earlier this month that the Holy Father has created a new Pontifical Council dedicated to the New Evangelisation: Nothing is by coincidence. The Holy Father wrote: '...it is not difficult to see that what all the Churches living in traditionally Christian territories need is a renewed missionary impulse, an expression of a new, generous openness to the gift of grace.'

One of the key words used by the Pope is 'grace' which is defined in the Catechism of the Catholic Church as: 'Grace is favour, the free and undeserved help that God gives us to respond to his call to become children of God, adoptive sons, partakers of the divine nature and of eternal life.' (1996) The Church in the UK has been showered with graces in recent times, filled with them and there is a reason for this. In the spiritual life, great and enormous graces are often the precursor to an intense time of ministry and mission. In the lives of the saints we don't have to look far to see evidence of this. St Paul's conversion was a life-changing experience which totally altered the direction of his life and work. Whilst most of us won't have St Paul-like, road to Damascus experiences (Acts chp. 9), we may well have received in the last twelve months graces of another kind. These are not to be kept for ourselves but are always conferred to strengthen us to serve and love others.



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The other important word that the Holy Father used is 'impulse' which can be defined as an urge or a compelling force to do or say something. In the Christian life this impulse is the movement of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and is it an essential part of the new evangelisation to which we are all called. We can not manufacture this impulse. It is a pure gift from God and that is why daily prayer to the Holy Spirit is so important in the lives of missionary people. This same Spirit compelled the apostles on the day of Pentecost to proclaim the Good News of Jesus. He will do the same for us if our hearts are open to Him, as the theme of the Papal Visit suggested, 'heart speaking unto heart'.

In a practical way, what does all this mean? We mustn't let the grass grow under our feet. We've received many graces as a Catholic Community during the past year and we've been given an explicit invitation to be renewed in Home Mission. Three suggested and urgent practical responses are:

1) Prayer to the Holy Spirit and Confession

Daily prayer to the Holy Spirit is central to the life of every Catholic: Make a commitment to that in your own life. We can't go it alone and we need God's grace to help us. If you haven't received the Sacrament of Reconciliation in recent weeks, resolve to do so; in this way you will be renewed and strengthened for your unique mission.

2) 'One Step' Programme

Identify one thing that you can do in response to recent events that makes your faith visible or heard in your daily life, that you didn't do before: it may be that you choose to wear daily a crucifix for others to see; ending phone conversations with 'God bless you' can be appropriate and well-received; you may choose to send people a card on their saint's day with some information about that saint; commit to regular acts of charity.

3) Christmas Outreach

Begin a conversation in your own family and parish now about how you can reach out to people during Advent and the Christmas season. Consider particularly how you can welcome and invite people who are non churchgoing Catholics and those who are not baptised to join the religious festivities in some way. As His Holiness wrote in his apostolic letter announcing the creation of the new Pontifical Council: "'Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction" (n. 1).' Be instruments of facilitating that encounter.

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Papal Visit Legacy resources are currently being added to the Bishops' Conference and Papal Visit website under four headings: Prayer - Catechesis - Outreach - Social Action. See: <http://www.thepapalvisit.org.uk/2010-Visit/The-Legacy-of-the-Pope-s-Visit-to-the-UK-Some-Definite-Purpose> and http://www.catholicchurch.org.uk/Catholic-Church/the_bishops_work/Evangelisation

This resource was prepared by the Home Mission Desk of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.

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