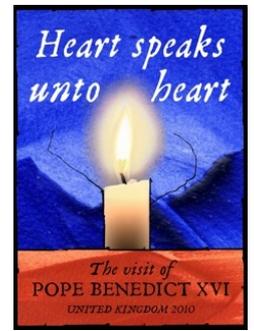


Some Definite Purpose: Papal Visit Legacy

Feast Of The Chair Of St Peter, Apostle

22 February 2011

This sheet may be used in small groups to frame discussion and prayer.



Opening Prayer

V - Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of Your faithful.

R - And kindle in them the fire of Your love.

V - Send forth Your spirit, Lord, and they shall be created.

R - And You shall renew the face of the earth.

Let us pray,

O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of Your faithful; grant that in the same Spirit we may be truly wise and ever rejoice in His consolation. Through the same Christ, Our Lord.
Amen.

Introduction

Nearly six months ago His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI, visited the UK for four days on the first ever state visit of a Pope. He met the Queen, bishops, representatives of civil society, religious, teachers, school children and students, representatives from other religions, leaders of other Christian traditions, safeguarding professionals, the sick and elderly, young people and seminarians. He greeted and prayed with thousands of pilgrims at Bellahouston, Hyde and Cofton Parks, beatifying Cardinal John Henry Newman before returning home.

In prayer we give thanks to God for those joy-filled days of grace. Spend a moment now bringing to mind your memories.

Pause for reflection and then members of the group are invited to share their reminiscences.

The Feast

Today ('This week' depending on when you are meeting) it is appropriate to remember the Holy Father's visit and to pray for him in a special way because in the life of the universal Church we celebrate the Feast of the Chair of St Peter. This is the Chair from which Pope Benedict presides in Rome as the Apostle's successor and it is kept in St. Peter's Basilica. It is a symbol of the authority of the Bishop of Rome as the Vicar of Christ and successor of Peter. This Feast celebrates how the See of St Peter is also a symbol of the unity of the Church founded on the Apostle Saint Peter. Peter was given a unique mission as teacher and pastor which is continued in an unbroken line to the present Pope.

The Gospel passage for the Feast is from the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 16: 13 - 19. As we listen to this passage now, we're invited to be attentive to a word, phrase or scene that particularly speaks to us.

A member of the group is now invited to read this Gospel passage to everyone twice, pausing for at

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least a minute or two between each reading, and for a minute or two after the second reading.

Group members are then invited to share what most struck them in this passage.

Conscience And Magisterium

Blessed John Henry Newman wrote of the Church's teaching authority, also called the Magisterium: 'I shall drink—to the Pope, if you please,—still, to Conscience first, and to the Pope afterwards.' (*Letter to the Duke of Norfolk*, 1875) Today's Feast does not mean that we are being invited to celebrate and encourage a blind and unquestioning following of teaching imposed by others: This is a misunderstanding of the role of the Pope and Bishops. The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that: 'Man has the right to act in conscience and in freedom so as personally to make moral decisions. "He must not be forced to act contrary to his conscience. Nor must he be prevented from acting according to his conscience, especially in religious matters."' (1782)

However, we also have a duty to develop a well-informed conscience. The Catechism reads: 'Conscience must be informed and moral judgment enlightened,' (1783) and the Magisterium is a gift to each one of us as instituted by Jesus Christ. He conferred on St Peter and the other Apostles the authority to teach and interpret the truth of Faith. So too do his successors, the Popes and Bishops. They judge authoritatively what is in accord with the Gospel of Jesus Christ and what is not.

Few would argue with the truth that we all need direction in our lives. That is why it is so important for every Catholic to read and study their faith, guided by the Church's teaching authority. Jesus knew we would struggle in the Christian life and so gave us the Magisterium as a guide for daily life, enlightened also by the Scriptures and Tradition of the Church. The Catechism of the Catholic Church helps people to come to a deeper understanding of the fullness of Truth that is found in the person of Jesus Christ and his Church. It is critical that we all put our intellect at the service of the Gospel and one another.

Pause for a moment to allow group members to read the above a second time. Group members are then invited to share their response to what's just been read.

Call To Witness

Another key truth that the Feast invites us to reflect upon is the Church's call to witness to our faith, to evangelise. In today's Gospel, St Peter proclaims on the Sea of Tiberias, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven." (Matthew 16:13-19) St Peter is the first to recognise and proclaim the Divinity of Christ and was appointed by Jesus to be the rock, the foundation of His Church, chosen from the Twelve.



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Whilst Peter and his successors lead the Church, we are reminded that every follower of Jesus Christ receives the call to proclaim confidently God's unconditional love and mercy in their lives and in the lives of others. In an encyclical by Pope Paul VI called *Evangelii Nuntiandi* we read: '...it is the whole Church that receives the mission to evangelise, and the work of each individual member is important for the whole.' (15) Like St Peter we are called to proclaim the truth of Jesus. We have each been called and chosen to witness confidently in our daily life that Jesus is Lord.

We will all be called to proclaim in different ways, remembering that all we do to proclaim Jesus Christ is based on God's love for us and for all. During the Pope's visit to the UK he witnessed through his words, prayers and actions.

To Discuss

- 1) What visible signs do you wear or have on display in your homes to witness to your faith?
- 2) When was the last time that you spoke to someone about your faith?
- 3) When was the last time that you prayed for the mission of the Church in England and Wales?

Intercessions And Closing Prayer

We pray for our Pope and for our Bishops who teach with the authority of Christ. Lord, pour out afresh your Holy Spirit on them, especially on our diocesan Bishop (*insert his name*). *Lord hear us, Lord graciously hear us.*

We pray for the gift of a well-informed conscience. Enlighten our hearts and minds by the power of your Spirit. *Lord hear us, Lord graciously hear us.*

At Oscott Seminary, His Holiness said: 'In the course of my visit it has become clear to me how deep a thirst there is among the British people for the Good News of Jesus Christ. You have been chosen by God to offer them the living water of the Gospel... be sure to present in its fulness the life-giving message of the Gospel.' (Oscott Seminary, 19 September) This is our task. We pray to respond ever more generously to the call to evangelise. *Lord hear us, Lord graciously hear us.*

The group are now invited to share their prayer intentions.

We offer to the Lord all our prayers, spoken and unspoken. As we prepare to leave this place may we may realise Blessed John Henry Newman's desire to radiate Christ to everyone. Newman prayerfully meditated:

Dear Jesus,
help me to spread Thy fragrance everywhere I go.
Flood my soul with Thy spirit and life.
Penetrate and possess my whole being so utterly
that all my life may only be a radiance of Thine.
Shine through me,
and be so in me that every soul I come in contact with

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Image: <http://www.thepapalvisit.org.uk/Cardinal-Newman/About-Newman/Newman-s-life-and-times>

may feel Thy presence in my soul.
Let them look up and see no longer me
but only Jesus!
Stay with me,
and then I shall begin to shine
as Thou shinest,
so to shine as to be a light to others;
the light, O Jesus, will be all from Thee;
none of it will be mine;
it will be Thou shining on others through me.
Let me thus praise Thee in the way Thou dost love best
by shining on those around me.

Let me preach Thee without preaching,
not by words but by my example,
by the catching force of the sympathetic influence
of what I do,
the evident fulness of the love my heart bears to Thee.
Amen.

Suggested Action After the Small Group Meeting

In light of the Holy Father's recent visit you are invited to read or study one of his written works. All the addresses, speeches and homilies from his UK visit are available for free from: <http://www.thepapalvisit.org.uk/speeches>

Free Resource

A free leaflet is being provided called *Everyday Evangelising*. It can be downloaded from the Home Mission page of the Catholic Bishops' Conference website: <http://www.catholicchurch.org.uk/Catholic-Church/Home-Mission> It offers simple ideas about how to proclaim your faith in your daily life whether at home, work or play.

The above was adapted from a text written by Rt Rev Kieran Conry (Arundel and Brighton), Chair of the Department for Evangelisation and Catechesis), February 2011.

This sheet was prepared by the Home Mission Desk of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales: <http://www.catholicchurch.org.uk/Catholic-Church/Home-Mission>

For more information about the Papal Visit legacy please see: <http://www.thepapalvisit.org.uk/Visit-Legacy>