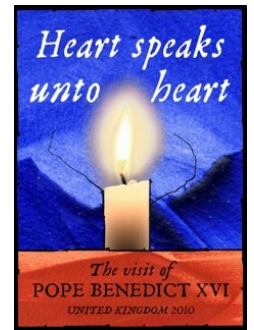


Some Definite Purpose: Papal Visit Legacy

Feast of the Chair of St Peter, Apostle

22 February 2011

This text may be read out during Mass and / or used in small groups to frame discussion and prayer.



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. Today, now or later on, you are invited pause for a moment to bring to mind your memories.

Today 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.

Today's Gospel passage reads: 'You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.' (Matthew 16:13-19) This feast celebrates how the See of St Peter is 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. We are also invited to pray for our Pope and for our Bishops who teach with the authority of Christ.

Blessed John Henry Newman wrote of this 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.

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In light of the Holy Father's recent visit it might be timely to reflect when the last time was that you read or studied one of his works?

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.

Another key truth that today's 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.

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. During the Pope's visit to the UK he witnessed through his words, prayers and actions. Inspired by the example of St Peter today it might be timely to reflect on what visible signs you wear or have on display in your homes to witness to your faith? Perhaps consider when was the last time that you spoke to someone about your faith? When was the last time that you prayed for the mission of the Church in England and Wales? We should remember that all we do to proclaim Jesus Christ is based on God's love for us and for all.

To support us in this task a free leaflet is being provided called *Everyday Evangelising*. It can be downloaded from the Home Mission page of the Catholic Bishops' Conference website.* It offers simple ideas about how to proclaim your faith in your daily life whether at home, work or play.

The Chair of Saint Peter itself is kept in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. It is a symbol of the authority of the Bishop of Rome as the Vicar of Christ and successor of Peter. Today, on this special feast day, we pray to respond ever more generously to the invitation that our present Holy Father gave to us



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during his visit. He 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, so that 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
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.



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

Rt Rev Kieran Conry (Arundel and Brighton), Chair of the Department for Evangelisation and Catechesis), February 2011

*The address of this page can be printed in the parish newsletter: <http://www.catholicchurch.org.uk/Catholic-Church/Home-Mission>

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