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Q & A: Archbishop Nichols

Michael Sean Winters | Sep. 13, 2010 Distinctly Catholic

Later this week, Pope Benedict XVI will visit the United Kingdom. The highlight of the trip will be the beatification of John Henry Cardinal Newman. This week at Q & A we will explore what Newman's life and legacy mean for the Church of the 21st Century and we will ask several Newman scholars what Newman would say to the church today. But we begin with some thoughts about what Newman's beatification means for the church in the UK from the Archbishop of Westminster and Primate of England, Archbishop Vincent Nichols.

The question: What does Newman's beatification mean for the Church in the UK?

Archbishop Nichols: One of the highlights of the Holy Father?s visit to Britain will be the beatification of Cardinal Newman on 19th September. By holding up Cardinal Newman as an example of holiness, attention will be drawn to this man?s life of service, his search for truth, his outstanding intellect, his commitment to education, and his faith in God. John Henry Newman appeals to me, above all else, as a parish priest. For 30 years or so he served the people of his parish in Birmingham with great practical kindness, thoughtfulness and self-sacrifice. He was esteemed by the priests of the diocese (an accolade not easily won) and loved by his people for whom he worked tirelessly. They turned out in their thousands on the day of his burial. In all probability, they had not read his books or letters, although they had heard his sermons. But they knew his way of life and his love for them. What a marvellous gift: that an English parish priest is to be beatified! How much encouragement we can take from this!

Cardinal Newman was a man of great intellect and wisdom, but he was not inward looking. In all things he was Christ-centred and self-giving. His well-known words ?lead, kindly light? remind us that his life had direction because of his faith, it had meaning. Newman?s life shone with love and goodness, and these qualities are no less attractive today than they were in his own time. For many years Pope Benedict has had devotion to Newman and he is sure to share his enthusiasm with the thousands who gather for the beatification. When the bishops and I visited the Holy Father this February he spoke to us of Newman, saying ?Great writers and communicators of his stature and integrity are needed in the Church today, and it is my hope that devotion to him will inspire many to follow in his footsteps.? Our recognition of sanctity always takes place within the context of the communion of saints. As we journey in faith together we are inspired by their examples, we ask for their prayers, and we are led to see just how transformative a life of virtue can be.

Tomorrow's Interviewee: Father Richard Duffield, Provost of the Oratory at Birmingham -- that is, Newman's successor.

Stories in this series on the papal visit to Scotland and England:

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All this week in his Distinctly Catholic blog, Michael Sean Winters is interviewing a variety of Newman scholars:

- Fr. Joseph Komonchak, taught ecclesiology at Catholic University, wrote his dissertation on Newman [20]
- Christopher Pramuk, Assistant professor of Theology at Xavier University in Cincinnati [21]
- Ian Ker, Professor at Oxford University and author of a Newman biography [22]
- The Very Reverend Richard Duffield, the Provost of the Birmingham Oratory [23]
- Archbishop Vincent Nichols, the Archbishop of Westminster and Primate of England [24]

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