

**Sermon for Solemn Evensong,
Procession of the Blessed Sacrament & Benediction**

on the occasion of the first anniversary of the erection of the
Personal Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham

St James, Spanish Place, London
Sunday 15 January 2012

In June 1848 our patron, the Blessed John Henry Newman, wrote a letter to the father of Francis Cardinal Bourne, sometime Archbishop of Westminster. Bourne's father had been received into the Catholic Church some months before Newman but he had heard a rumour that Newman was unhappy. Newman wrote:

I can only say, if it is necessary to say it, that from the moment I became a Catholic, I have never had, through God's grace, a single doubt or misgiving on my mind that I did wrong in becoming one. I have not had any feeling whatever but one of joy and gratitude that God called me out of an insecure state into one which is sure and safe, out of the war of tongues and into the realm of peace and assurance. This is my state of mind, and I would it could be brought home to all and every one, who, in default of real arguments for remaining Anglicans, amuse themselves with dreams and fancies.

Those thoughts could be expressed by many of us today though probably not so well. They reflect something of what those of us who have been received into the full communion of the Catholic Church through the Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham have experienced over the last twelve months. The sentiments of joy and thanksgiving, two great Christian words, are ones which should characterize our first anniversary celebration this evening which is a beautiful and appropriate expression of our Anglican patrimony.

Many of us will remember that the theme of Christian joy was a favourite one in the preaching of the late Eric Kemp, for many years Bishop of Chichester. The fact that he could preach on joy with a somber expression and not the hint of a smile only underlined the truth that Christian joy is not the same as happiness or jollity. Such things are the result of outward events which give us pleasure of one sort or another: an important family occasion, a beautiful piece of music or some visual experience. Christian joy is quite different. Real joy comes not from stimuli outside of us but from deep within. For those who experience that joy, it is a spring that does not run

dry because Jesus himself is the source; it is the echo of his life within us and an anticipation of the beatific vision. 'May the God of all hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing' says St Paul in his Epistle to the Romans (Rom 15:13).

In his book 'The Realm' Father Aidan Nichols OP described Anglo Catholics as 'beyond doubt as to doctrine, worship and devotion though not ecclesial communion, a displaced portion of the Catholic Christendom.' Those words resonated with me when I first read them but left me asking what had to be done to further that goal of being in a proper relationship with rest Catholic Christendom. The answer has been given to us. The impetus to respond to the provisions set out in the Apostolic Constitution *Anglicanorum Coetibus*, was not the impending consecration of women bishops in the Church of England, but the prayer of Our Lord Jesus Christ the night before he died that his disciples might be one. That unity flows from the unity of the Holy trinity but is made visible in the communion of the Church. This experience of communion for me continues to be a source of great joy.

This does not mean that we should not be thankful for what we received from the Church of England, for some over very many years. It is an inheritance of faith and practice that is noble and beautiful. Despite the difficulties of recent years, it has nurtured our faith in Christ and for those who are priests it was where we recognized our vocation to serve our lord through ordination. But we have much more to give thanks for this year as God has led us to a new and holy place, not leaving behind all our precious possessions, but bringing with us into the Catholic Church those things which are consistent with its faith and we have done this not alone, as individuals, but together as a previously displaced portion of the people of God. We have also experienced that practical charity and open heartedness towards neighbours, encouraged in tonight's first reading, from many brothers and sisters in the Catholic Church.

This theme of thanksgiving is a key element in both the old and New Testament. St Paul emphasises again and again, as he did in this evening's second reading, the need to give thanks. Indeed the word used for the primary Christian celebration, the Eucharist, is the Greek word for giving thanks.

We gather week by week around the Lord's altar, to give thanks for all God has done for us and through us and in us, but most especially for what he has done in Christ, who gave himself for our salvation and was raised to new life and enthroned in glory. In return that same Christ feeds us with himself to sustain us in our Christian living. .

We are to be a Eucharistic community and that doesn't mean simply that the Eucharist is the centre of our liturgical life but that that the Eucharist overflows into Eucharistic living.

Each time we celebrate the Eucharist, or adore his presence we are reminded that the essence of Christian living is a life of thanksgiving to and rejoicing in the Lord. At the Eucharist Christ invites us to his supper just as we are, with all the frailties, defects, doubts and fears. He forgives us our failings, feeds us with himself that we may be again set on the straight and narrow way from which we often wander. He gives us an example of what we might be in the beatitudes. The blessed are not the clever, the rich the successful, the film stars or politicians but the poor in spirit, the gentle those who hunger for right, the peacemakers.

Our Eucharistic procession tonight is a visual parable of this last year and of our whole lives as we journey to the Promised Land with thankful hearts and with Christ at the centre leading and guiding us.

This evening then we have much to be joyful and thankful for.

For the gifts and spiritual riches of Anglicanism which nurtured our faith. For the warmth of welcome and support we have received from so many Catholics lay and ordained. For organisations and individuals who have supported us financially in these early months. For the vision, love and faith of Our Holy Father Pope Benedict.

But in the words of the General Thanksgiving, we will use later this evening: 'above all for thine inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ, for the means of grace and for the hope of glory.'

So can we do anymore this evening than repeat the words of Dag Hammerskold, Swedish diplomat and Secretary General of the United Nations until his tragic death in 1961?

For all that has been, thanks. For all that will be, yes.

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