

Cardinal Newman and the Immaculate Heart of Mary

Studying the writings of Blessed John Henry Newman is no easy task. For those familiar with Cardinal Newman, he was a prolific writer. Fr. Beaumont, a Priest of the French Oratory and writer of the authorized biography for Newman's Beatification wrote:

Newman has left us a vast body of writings: he himself published 37 volumes; a dozen or so others have appeared since his death; and new, hitherto unpublished writings continue to appear! Nor should we forget the some twenty thousand letters by him which survive, which have now been published in 32 large volumes.... His published work displays also an astonishing diversity: 12 volumes of sermons; numerous theological and historical studies, including a large number of essays devoted to the Church Fathers...; a work on the principles of university education...; a religious autobiography; meditations and prayers; a volume of verse and a long dramatic poem...and finally even two novels.¹

Yet while this might seem daunting, this presentation will only give a few highlights from Newman's sermons, meditations, prayers and devotions. His love for the Immaculate Heart of Mary is clear and hopefully it will be an inspiration for all who wish to grow in love for her.

John Henry Newman, through the course of his life, grew in his love for the Mother of God. Born in London in 1801, he was the oldest of six children of Anglican parents. He was given as his foundation a strong education in the Scriptures; eventually, he moved to seeing his religious formation as merely a means to becoming a good gentleman. Yet at the age of fifteen, John had what he called his "first conversion." No longer did he wish to follow the road of self-sufficiency but he realized the presence of God in his soul. His yearning led him to learn more about God. At the age of sixteen he started attending Trinity College, Oxford where he stayed for a total of twenty-eight years. While at Oxford, he was ordained an Anglican deacon. In 1825, a year after his ordination to the diaconate, he was ordained an Anglican priest. At the age of 27,

¹ Keith Beaumont, *Blessed John Henry Newman* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010), 7.

he was appointed Vicar of the University Church, St. Mary the Virgin in Oxford, where he preached his famous parochial sermons, at least three focusing on the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Many events led Newman on the road to the Catholic Church. One significant aspect was his work in the Oxford Movement, a group aimed at renewing the Anglican Church. As he studied more of the Church of England, he was drawn into the Roman Catholic Church. On October 9, 1845, he was received into the Roman Catholic Church. After a year of studies in Rome, he was ordained a Catholic priest on May 30, 1847; he stayed in Rome the remainder of the year, in the Oratorian Novitiate at Santa Croce. He learned what it meant to be a son of St. Philip Neri, in order to establish the Oratorians in England; he did this on February 1, 1848 in Maryvale. Eventually he established an Oratory dedicated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. At the age of 78, Newman was given the red hat by Pope Leo XIII; a Cardinal for eleven years, he died on August 11, 1890 at the age of 89.

Not only did Newman spend his 89 years on earth writing about and defending the truths of the faith, he wrote much on the Blessed Virgin Mary. He lauded her praises while an Anglican and a Catholic. He answered concerns about Mary's role, wrote meditations on her titles and even some prayers extolling her virtues. In his *Apologia pro Vita Sua*, he recorded, "I had a true devotion to the Blessed Virgin, in whose College I lived, whose Altar I served, and whose Immaculate Purity I had in one of my earliest printed Sermons made much of."² But one of his greatest tributes to honoring the Immaculate Heart of Mary is his *Litany of the Immaculate Heart of Mary* which he wrote shortly after his reception into the Roman Catholic Church. This talk will examine the sermons and writings of Cardinal Newman, following as an outline the titles he gives to her in his litany.

² John Henry Cardinal Newman, *Apologia pro Vita Sua* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1956), 261.

Heart of Mary, according to the Heart of God, united to the heart of Jesus, organ of the Holy Spirit and sanctuary of the Divine Trinity, pray for us.

Mary truly was a masterpiece of the Blessed Trinity. She was so attuned to the will of God, never did she sway from the love of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Blessed Trinity dwelt within her from the very first moment of her existence. Yet even though the Scriptures do not give us many details about Mary, one can see from her actions the devotedness of the Immaculate Heart to God. John Henry Newman explained this idea in a sermon comparing what is known about St. Paul from Scripture and what is known about the Blessed Virgin Mary. One can see,

that faithful as he was in his obedience, still the history given of him cannot but have upon it those infirmities which all sons of Adam inherit. But in regard to Mary, we look to one whose actions we know not of and cannot, if we could, too closely imitate, whose name only recalls to us bright and pleasant thoughts, the emblem of early devotedness to God, guiltless piety, angelic purity, meekness, modesty and patience, shining only in the light of her Son and in the ineffable radiance of the Spirit of power who came upon her and overshadowed her....³

God chose for so great a task one that would belong totally to Him.

In loving Mary and choosing her, God showed His great love for us, His creatures. “Therefore, instead of sending His Son from heaven, He sent Him forth as the Son of Mary, to show that all our sorrow and all our corruption can be blessed and changed by Him.”⁴ Jesus came to us through Mary and Mary leads us to her Son. Our lives have been transformed by Mary’s “fiat”.

³ John Henry Newman, *Mary: the Virgin Mary in the Life and Writings of John Henry Newman*, ed. Philip Boyce (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 113.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 118.

Heart of Mary, tabernacle of God Incarnate, pray for us.

Throughout Newman's writings, we see a deep understanding of the dogmas of Mary: Mary as the Mother of God, her Immaculate Conception and her Assumption. Interestingly, the dogma of the Immaculate Conception was defined during Cardinal Newman's lifetime and the Assumption was defined after his death. Each of these relates to the Incarnation of the second Person of the Blessed Trinity, God becoming man in the womb of the Virgin Mary. If Mary is to carry within her God Incarnate, then it follows that she is immaculately conceived and assumed body and soul into heaven. Bishop Philip Boyce, a Newman scholar, wrote, "A ground for Mary's blessedness is connected with her holiness, which sprang from her nearness to Christ, the incarnate Son of God."⁵

Newman always kept in mind the incarnation of Jesus as he spoke of the special relationship between Mary and Jesus. In a sermon entitled "The Honour due to the Blessed Virgin," he stated, "Certainly He thought of her on the cross; at the very hour that He was dying for all. And if He remembers her, how can it be right in us to pass her by in silence, especially with the implied command...to count her blessed to all generations?"⁶ Christ shows each Christian how to treat His Mother.

The heart of Mary was the dwelling place for the Son of God. In his meditations on the *Litany of Loretto*, Newman wrote, "She is the house and the palace of the Great King, of God Himself. Our Lord, the Co-equal Son of God, once dwelt in her...our Lord was actually *born in* this holy house. He took His flesh and His blood from this house, from the flesh, from the veins of Mary."⁷ God gave Mary her great dignity.

⁵ Philip Boyce, introduction to *Mary: The Virgin Mary in the Life and Writings of John Henry Newman* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 20.

⁶ Newman, *Mary*, 108

⁷ *Ibid.*, 368.

He could not reflect enough on Mary's unique role in being the dwelling-place of God. "On her was bestowed the greatest honour ever put upon any individual of our fallen race. God was taking upon Him her flesh, and humbling Himself to be called her offspring; - such is the deep mystery!"⁸ It would naturally follow that she would be preserved from all stain of original sin and never committed any actual sin.

Heart of Mary, Immaculate in your conception and full of grace, *pray for us.*

With the dogma of the Immaculate Conception being defined during Cardinal Newman's lifetime, he spent much time reflecting upon this mystery:

as to Mary, her holiness was such, that if we saw her, and heard her, we should not be able to tell to those who asked us anything about her except simply that she was angelic and heavenly....We should not recollect any of her features, because it was her beautifully sinless soul, which looked through her eyes, and spoke through her mouth, and was heard in her voice, and compassed her all about; ...There was a divine music in all she said and did - in her mien, her air, her deportment, that charmed every true heart that came near her. Her innocence, her humility and modesty, her simplicity, her sincerity and truthfulness, her unselfishness, her unaffected interest in everyone who came to her, her purity - it was these qualities which made her so lovable.⁹

While we are all familiar with the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception, Blessed Newman has a way of capturing the beauty of the mystery God bestowed on Mary. One cannot help be drawn into this great admiration for the heart of Mary.

Heart of Mary, throne of glory, abyss of humility, holocaust of divine love, *pray for us.*

While Mary was given such a lofty role, pride was far from her heart; she realized that she was an instrument in the hands of God, always ready to do his will whenever He called. Cardinal

⁸ Ibid., 116.

⁹ John Henry Newman, *Prayers, Verses and Devotions* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 124-125.

Newman preached, “And she had moreover, we may will suppose, that purity and innocence of heart, that bright vision of faith, that confiding trust in her God, which raised all these feelings to an intensity which we, ordinary mortals, cannot understand.”¹⁰ Because she was sinless, she knew better than all who she was before God.

Yet this does not make Mary unapproachable; she is very much near to us. We only need to turn to her. In one of his meditations, Cardinal Newman pleaded, “Stand by me, Holy Mother, that I may gain somewhat of thy purity, thy innocence, thy faith, and He may be the one object of my love and my adoration, as he was of thine.”¹¹ It is by turning to Mary that we can learn how to love Jesus as He is to be loved.

Heart of Mary, fastened to the cross with Jesus crucified, *pray for us.*

For Blessed John Henry Newman, an Immaculate Heart meant a sorrowful heart as well. If Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, suffered, so would Mary the Mother of the incarnate Son of God. Her purity made her so attuned to the sufferings inflicted on her Son that she suffered with Him. In a prayer found underneath the statue of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in Newman’s Oratory he made this connection: “Holy the womb that bare Him, Holy the breasts that fed, But holier still the royal heart That in His passion bled.”¹²

In one of his earliest sermons on the Blessed Virgin Mary, he asked his listeners, “And can He remember His own sorrow, and not the sword which pierced His Mother’ soul?”¹³ Jesus willingly gave His life for our salvation; Mary accepted the sufferings of her Son as it brought about our salvation. This compassion experienced by Mary was most intense as her heart was an

¹⁰ Newman, *Mary*, 116.

¹¹ Newman, *Prayers*, 352.

¹² *Ibid.*, 315.

¹³ Newman, *Mary*, 109.

immaculate heart. “And when sorrow came upon her afterwards, it was but the blessed participation of her Son’s sacred sorrows, not the sorrow of those who suffer for their sins.”¹⁴

Mary suffered because of our sins.

Later in his life as he wrote his meditations on the *Litany of Loreto*, Newman was given deep insight into the sorrowful heart of Mary. A person with many friends and acquaintances, Cardinal Newman showed how great the bond is between those who love each other:

Because she was His mother, and because she had Him and all His sufferings actually before her eyes, and because she had the long intimacy of thirty years with Him, and because she was from her special sanctity so ineffably near to Him in spirit. When, then, He was mocked, bruised, scourged, and nailed to the Cross, she felt as keenly as if every indignity and torture inflicted on Him was struck at herself. She could have cried out in agony at every pang of His.¹⁵

Newman understood the compassion of Mary standing at the foot of the Cross. In another section, he repeated what many saints have noted as well, Mary’s position at the foot of the cross. He wrote, “It is expressly noted of her that she *stood upright* to receive the blows, the stabs, which the long Passion of her Son inflicted upon her every moment.”¹⁶ Mary did not waver as she watched her Son on the Cross.

This connects to a favorite idea of Newman’s: Mary as the New Eve. Just as Eve, standing at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, disobeyed God, so Mary, obediently standing at the cross, untied the knot of Eve’s disobedience. Cardinal Newman studied the early Church Fathers, finding in them a connection to the early Church and, thus, to the early devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary.

¹⁴ Ibid., 127.

¹⁵ Ibid., 394.

¹⁶ Ibid., 400.

Heart of Mary, comfort of the afflicted, refuge of sinners, hope of the agonizing, *pray for us.*

For Newman, Mary was with each Christian everyday, helping him or her through the struggles of life, the ups and downs of one's duties. He acknowledged, "God gives His Holy Spirit to us silently; and the silent duties of every day (it may be humbly hoped) are blest to the sufficient sanctification of thousands, who the world knows not of. The Blessed Virgin is a memorial of this; and it is consoling as well as instructive to know it."¹⁷ During the hidden life with her Son and St. Joseph, she showed her fidelity in the little events of her life.

Mary understands our plight for she has experienced the joys and the sufferings of life. "This is the secret of true consolation: those are able to comfort others who in their own case, have been much tried, and have felt the need of consolation, and have received it....And this too is why the Blessed Virgin is the comforter of the afflicted. We all know how special a mother's consolation is, and we are allowed to call Mary our Mother..."¹⁸ Cardinal Newman truly understood the love of a mother.

Mary helps us regardless of who we are, our ages, our position. She desires to assist each of her children in a special way. In one sermon, Cardinal Newman drew special attention to the young people in attendance. He encouraged them, "She will comfort you in your discouragements, solace you in your fatigues, raise you after your falls, reward you for your successes. She will show you her Son your God and your all."¹⁹ All are called to find in Mary's Immaculate Heart a refuge of peace and consolation.

¹⁷ Ibid., 126.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 397

Heart of Mary, seat of wisdom, *pray for us.*

We learn so much from Mary who spent so much time with Jesus; she teaches us how to receive His wisdom. “The Son of God, who is also called in Scripture the Word and Wisdom of God, once dwelt in her, and then, after His birth of her, was carried in her arms and seated in her lap in His first years...Mary for thirty continuous years saw and heard him, being all through that time face to face with Him.”²⁰ The Heart of Mary does lead us to the Heart of her Son. She has been given so much but that is to help us draw closer to Jesus.

Cardinal Newman was well aware of this special relationship between the two hearts; in one of his prayers, he begs a participation in this great union:

O Mother of Jesus, and my Mother, let me dwell with you, cling to you and love you with ever-increasing love. I promise the honor, love and trust of a child. Give me a mother's protection, for I need your watchful care. You know better than any other the thoughts and desires of the Sacred Heart. Keep constantly before my mind the same thoughts, the same desires, that my heart may be filled with zeal for the interests of the Sacred Heart of your Divine Son. Instill in me a love of all that is noble, that I may no longer be easily turned to selfishness.

Help me, dearest Mother, to acquire the virtues that God wants of me: to forget myself always, to work solely for him, without fear of sacrifice. I shall always rely on your help to be what Jesus wants me to be. I am his; I am yours, my good Mother! Give me each day your holy and maternal blessing until my last evening on earth, when your Immaculate Heart will present me to the heart of Jesus in heaven, there to love and bless you and your divine Son for all eternity.²¹

Conclusion

It can be wondered of all the titles of Mary for Cardinal Newman to reflect upon, write a litany over, and name his oratory after that it should be the Immaculate Heart of Mary. He was

²⁰ Ibid., 381, 383.

²¹ <http://campus.udayton.edu/mary/prayers/cardinalnewman.html>

aware of her great love in bringing him into the Catholic faith as he was one of the many pilgrims who went to Our Lady of Victories in Paris. Shortly after his conversion to the Catholic faith on his way to Rome in 1846, Cardinal Newman visited the headquarters of the *Archconfraternity of the Holy and Immaculate Heart of Mary for the conversion of sinners*.²² For one who chose “Heart speaks to Heart” as his motto as Cardinal, he knew the power of an Immaculate Heart in coming to the aid of her children.

Not only does Cardinal Newman show us what it means to be a Christian, he shows us how to be a child of Mary. One can see in many of his prayers, his great devotion to Mary, especially in his desire to imitate her purity and holiness. One prayer of his that has become famous through Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta is known under many titles, but it begins “Dear Jesus, help me to spread thy fragrance everywhere I go.” This prayer comes from his collection of meditations and is entitled: “Jesus the Light of the Soul.” I believe it expresses the disposition of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

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. No merit to me. It will be Thou who shinest through me upon others. O Let me thus praise Thee in the way which Thou dost love best, by shining on all those around me. Give light to them as well to me; light them with me, through me. Teach me to show forth Thy praise, Thy truth, Thy will. Make me preach Thee without preaching – not by words, but by my example and by the catching force, the sympathetic influence, of what I do – by my visible resemblance to Thy saints, and the evident fullness of the love which my heart bears to Thee.²³

Cardinal Newman’s death in 1890 did not mark the end of the devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary in England; his legacy continued. On December 12, 1943, Msgr. Ronald A. Knox preached a sermon at the Oratory in London dedicated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

²² <http://www.notredamedesvictoires.com/newman.html>

²³ Newman, *Prayers*, 389-390.

He stated, “And for nearly ninety years we have had a Church in London dedicated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, waiting till the time should come for it to play its part in the reconstruction of our national life after a great European catastrophe.”²⁴ Cardinal Newman had prepared many hearts to see the love of the Immaculate Heart. Monsignor Knox said as well,

Not for nothing has the Holy Father pointed us to the Immaculate Heart of Mary as the invocation, beyond all others, under which that task may be propitiously begun. For her delight is to be with the sons of men; she has not left us. We, over whom the years have passed, and left us disillusioned, may have no eyes to see her; but still once and again, at Lourdes or at Fatima, the innocence of childhood catches a glimpse, no more, of her presence; meets her, a gentle playmate, in the solitude of the hills.²⁵

A preparation had been made to love the Immaculate Heart of Mary, to be devoted to her. Her protection is sure in the most devastating of disasters. Hers is a mother’s love: “It is fitting , then, that this parish...should unite itself in prayer with the Vicar of Christ, whose paternal heart has so long been torn by our common tragedy: ‘Intercede for us, rebuild our ruined world for us, Heart of Mary, Immaculate Heart!’”²⁶

Immaculate Heart of Mary, meek and humble of heart; make our hearts according to the Heart of Jesus.

²⁴ Ronald A. Knox, *University Sermons of Ronald A. Knox*, ed. Philip Caraman, S.J. (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963), 418-419.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 418.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 419.