

## **In the Heartland October, 2010**

### **A Culture of Vocations**

On September 19<sup>th</sup>, Pope Benedict XVI beatified John Henry Cardinal Newman, in Birmingham, England, the last step prior to canonization.

Blessed John Henry Newman stands as a model from many perspectives – theologian, preacher, convert, priest and churchman, university professor, etc. His writings – books, sermons, correspondence – provide rich matter for reflection.

Among his writings, one excerpt particularly strikes me. It has to do with vocation, the call that God extends to each of us in His providence.

God has created me  
to do him some definite service  
he has committed some work to me  
which he has not committed to another

I have my mission  
I may never know what it is in this life  
But I shall be told in the next.

I am a link in a chain  
A bond of connection between persons  
He has not created me for nothing  
I shall do good work  
I shall do His work

He may take me away from my friends  
He may throw me among strangers  
He may make me feel desolate  
Make my spirits sink  
Hide my future from me –  
Still He knows what He is about . . . .

In this reflection, Cardinal Newman points out three dimensions of vocation that have universal application.

The first is that each of us has a unique vocation which no other human has been called to exercise. God has a particular purpose for each of us within the context of Providence. Each of us is a part of the body of Christ – essential to the full expression of that Body in our time.

The second is that we have to be attuned to the divine presence so that we can be receptive to God's voice. We struggle to overcome the impediments, the static and distractions which muffle or extinguish the communication emanating from God.

The third characteristic is an ongoing relationship with God which reveals the unfolding of a particular vocation within a vocation. The unique vocation each of us has is ultimately constituted by many callings. Inevitably attached to the experiences of an unfolding vocation is commitment that leads to perseverance and great discipline so that we are blessed with an identification and participation in the life of the Lord Jesus.

While Cardinal Newman attests to the possibility of not knowing this side of eternity the full extent and purpose in God's calling, we know that with all the background noise of our times, we benefit greatly from a "Culture of Vocation" whereby we are able to hear God's voice in order that we might at least have the opportunity to respond to it.

Elements of this culture of vocation give rise to harmony within God's providence. They include a classical continuum.

The Domestic Church which was promoted by the Second Vatican Council recognizes the unfolding of the vocation of husband and wife as found in the transmission of human and spiritual/divine life. Their mutual love and faith give way to an openness to the transcendent. Their children realize their own personal inherent value within the ups and downs of daily life. Over an extended period of time, they come to understand God is calling them to a particular role in His plan. Such is possible because God's presence, built into the home culture, is openly encouraged.

These nuclear families, the domestic church, associate in community as Church in which the Holy Spirit is alive and active among us believers. The Body of Christ is constituted to make Christ and his revelation present throughout the human family. The living organism of Church establishes relationships among members which forges one heart and one mind and a dynamic of service and selflessness. Central to the mission of these families fashioned into church is the task of Evangelization – making Jesus Christ known and loved in our times by choosing to live on the basis of the Gospel at every moment.

Our young people are further introduced into this expanding culture through our schools, our religious education programs, our youth ministry, home school programs and especially through the sacramental life of the Church.

As our youth part from their families and nurturing faith communities and enter into young adulthood and take ownership for their faith and seek to activate and commit to God's call in their lives, many supportive institutions in the Church are there for them. Educational institutions are committed to their Catholic identity and strive to fulfill their mission in the formation of the total person in synchronization with the Gospel.

All of us realize that peace of soul and penetrating happiness come when we are able to be fully identified and immersed in the particular call God has extended to me – a work

that He has committed to no other. May all of us in our particular station in life be committed to fostering a “Culture of vocation” so that God’s voice can be heard.

And once we are in that zone of hearing, we pray “If today you hear God’s voice, harden not your hearts.”