



A New Saint Speaks of Mary

On 13 October Pope Francis solemnly declared Cardinal John Henry Newman a saint of the Church. At the midpoint of his 90-year-long life the great Anglican preacher and writer crossed over to Catholicism, there to become one of the most influential converts in the history of the Church.

On my desk I have a picture I took 30 years ago of the pulpit in Oxford where our new saint preached hundreds of sermons that touched his listeners deeply and moved them decisively. One of those sermons, from which the following quotations are taken, fits nicely into the middle of Advent. Its title is "The Reverence Due to the Virgin Mary."

"I observe, that in her the curse pronounced on Eve was changed to a blessing. Eve was doomed to bear children in sorrow; but now this very dispensation . . . was made the means by which salvation came into the world. Christ might have . . . taken on Himself a body from the ground, as Adam was given; or been formed, like Eve, in some other divinely-devised way. But, far from this, God sent forth His Son (as St. Paul says), 'made of a woman.' For it has been His gracious purpose to turn *all* that is ours from evil to good. Had He so pleased, He might have found, when we sinned, other beings to do Him service, casting us into hell; but He purposed to save and to change *us*. . . . 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. The very punishment of the fall . . . admits of a cure by the coming of Christ. . . ."

"Who can estimate the holiness and perfection of her, who was chosen to be . . . the only near earthly relative of the Son of God, the only one whom He was bound by nature to revere and look up to; the one appointed to train and educate Him, to instruct Him day by day, as He grew in wisdom and in stature?" And yet, the Cardinal goes on, "I think everyone must feel some surprise, that we are not told more about the Blessed Virgin than we find [in the Gospels]. After . . . Christ's birth and infancy, we hear little of her. Little is said in praise of her. . . . But . . . in this silence we find instruction, as much as in the mention of her. . . ."

"Observe the lesson which we gain for ourselves . . . ; that the highest graces of the soul may be matured in private, and without those fierce trials to which the many are exposed in order to their sanctification. . . . God gives His Holy Spirit to us silently; and the silent duties of every day . . . are blest to the sufficient sanctification of thousands, whom the world knows not of. The Blessed Virgin is a memorial of this; and it is consoling as well as instructive to know it. When we quench the grace of Baptism, then it is that we need severe trials to restore us. . . . But there are those who go on in a calm and unswerving course, learning day by day to love Him who has redeemed them . . . as the various temptations to evil successively present themselves. And, of these undefiled followers of the Lamb, the Blessed Mary is the chief. . . . 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."

The canonization of St. John Henry Newman assures us that, like the Lady he revered, he will turn his face toward us when we call on him in need. St. John Newman, pray for us!