

NEWMAN HOUSE — Sermon of Bp John Sherrington

Sunday 24th October 2021

This morning I am very pleased to join you for the celebration of Mass and to welcome and formally induct Father Philip Miller as the Chaplain to Newman House and Senior Chaplain to the Universities in London. It is a joy to be back celebrating Mass ‘in your home’, at Newman House, although the provision of Mass at Somers Town was deeply appreciated during the pandemic. I am most grateful to Fr Jeremy Trood and the parish for facilitating this possibility.

Today Fr Philip formally takes on his responsibilities as Chaplain, leading you in prayer and worship, preparing you for reception of the sacraments and celebrating them with you, ensuring with others your pastoral care and seeking to extend the mission and work of the chaplaincy out into the wider university. Today you promise to pray for him and support him in his work. Today is also Mission Sunday when we reflect on the wider mission of the Church to which each of us is called NOW where we study and live. As Pope Francis writes in his message for this day, ‘The

theme of this year’s World Mission Day – “We cannot but speak about what we have seen and heard” (*Acts* 4:20), is a summons to each of us to “own” and to bring to others what we bear in our hearts. This mission has always been the hallmark of the Church, for “she exists to evangelize” (St Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 14).’

In Pope Francis’ encyclical *The Joy of the Gospel* (*Evangelii Gaudium*) he writes of the mission of the parish. Analogously we can apply this to the chaplaincy as a stable community with its chaplain, making a few modifications,

The chaplaincy is the presence of the Church here-and-now, an environment for hearing God’s word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration.

In all its activities the chaplaincy encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers.

It is a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a centre of constant missionary outreach. [EG 26]

I find those words ‘a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey’ very beautiful, and hope that Newman House will be a sanctuary for you where you can be nourished by God’s word, Christ’s sacraments, as well as convivial and joyful friendship, a place of welcome and love. This will help sustain you as you live out your Catholic faith with all the challenges of a secular context amongst people of very diverse opinions, of many faiths. You are called to witness to the faith we hold in our hearts as well as deepen your own appreciation and confidence in our Catholic life and teaching. The entrance antiphon of the Mass sums up this hope, ‘Let the hearts that seek the Lord rejoice; turn to the Lord and his strength; constantly seek his face.’

The first reading from the prophet Jeremiah speaks of God gathering his people together after the exile and bringing them home. The merciful Father will “guide them to streams of water, by a smooth path where they will not stumble.” Similarly, he guides each one of you; I pray that you will find comfort and solace here and in Christ.

Each of you is on a journey of faith and vocation; the journey of faith at university is an opportunity to deepen and re-enliven your

faith as adults. The journey of vocation is the calling of Christ in your lives to follow him as a disciple and discover the way he wants you to use your gifts for the service of others and the common good of our society. I hope that this call will become clearer over the months ahead.

In the gospel we hear the dramatic healing of Bartimaeus, the blind beggar. At a deeper level it is an image for the way he comes to faith by meeting Jesus. His healing and restoring of his sight is a metaphor for the finding and deepening of faith. The blind beggar is sitting at the roadside, observing and listening to all that is happening around him – just like so many on Tottenham Court Road. He hears that Jesus is coming and cries out, ‘Son of David, have pity on me’. It is a cry of the heart of one who feels lost and knows his needs. Perhaps many of you are also crying out in this way? It is the cry of many sitting at the roadside today without work, lives wrecked or in chaos for one reason or another. The crowd oppose him; there are always crowds who mock and scoff Christians. Jesus calls the man to him, others encourage him and he meets Jesus. Like Bartimaeus who asks for sight, we ask for deeper faith. Just as the sight of Bartimaeus is restored and he

follows Jesus along the road, when we cry from our hearts to Jesus, he comes close to us and deepens our faith so that we can follow him more closely.

After meeting Jesus more deeply, we are called to go out as messengers of compassion, to listen to the cry of those on our roadsides. In the papal message for Mission Sunday, Pope Francis writes,

“Contemplating [men and women of witness down the ages], we are inspired to be courageous ourselves and to beg “the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest” (Lk 10:2). We know that the call to mission is not a thing of the past, or a romantic leftover from earlier times. Today too Jesus needs hearts capable of experiencing vocation as a true love story that urges them to go forth to the peripheries of our world as messengers and agents of compassion. He addresses this call to everyone, and in different ways. We can think of the peripheries all around us, in the heart of our cities or our own families. Universal openness to love has a dimension that is not geographical but existential. Always, but especially in these times of

pandemic, it is important to grow in our daily ability to widen our circle, to reach out to others who, albeit physically close to us, are not immediately part of our ‘circle of interests’ (cf. [Fratelli Tutti](#), 97). To be on mission is to be willing to think as Christ does, to believe with him that those around us are also my brothers and sisters. May his compassionate love touch our hearts and make us all true missionary disciples.”