

## HOMILY ON THE FEAST OF THE BASILICA OF ST. JOHN LATERAN

My dear friends, we are called this morning to celebrate the dedication of the Basilica of St. John Lateran in Rome. As a people of faith, we do well always to honor one of our most holiest of places, a very special Church. Indeed, it is called the mother of all Churches, a sign of the universal Church because it is the cathedral church of our Holy Father, the bishop of Rome.

The original basilica was erected and dedicated on November 9, 324, after the Roman Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity. Constantine's conversion was prompted by a miraculous vision he saw immediately prior to engaging an invading hoard of barbarians, bent on sacking the eternal city. The vision consisted of a great, luminous cross appearing in the sky with the words, "By this cross, shall you conquer."

Attributing his magnificent triumph to this victorious sign of the cross, he subsequently declared that all Christians were free to worship and practice their faith. The basilica has also become a magnificent sign of victory for the countless numbers of martyrs to the faith in the first three centuries of the early Church. It now stands as a stately and enduring sign of hope and light that the Church world wide might continue to endure and prosper.

We are also enlivened by another and even more wondrous sign as we read the Gospel account of Jesus zealously expelling the money changers, desecrating His Father's House. When asked for some sign of His authority to justify His actions, Jesus refers them to the sign of His own self-sacrificial death on the cross, only to rise again to victory in three days. His resurrection to glory was the visible sign of the new and everlasting Temple, the Temple of His Body, the Church. And the Church is a visible sign of humanity's redemption, as Christ continues to zealously defend His Church against those bent upon desecrating Her.

Moreover, our holy and enduring Church lives on and is constantly renewed in a very special way by those called by Christ, as His servants to inspire and revitalize Her. One such a person, called for this purpose was Blessed John Henry Cardinal Newman. Although he died One hundred twenty years ago, Newman's thoughts and insights have enjoyed lasting acceptance, because they reflect the enduring truth about mankind's condition, and his instinctive quest for his Creator.

When gazing upon the din and clamor of our modern world, Bl. Cardinal Newman was gifted with a most extraordinary sense of foresight. A supernatural vision, enabling him to see far beyond the rather limited and worldly sight of his contemporaries. As a sign of Christ's presence in the world, he could see clearly that which was beyond the horizon. In the manner of Constantine, he could see clearly far above the clouds, to that shining cross in the sky, to that heavenly dimension. And he brilliantly preached and wrote about all that he saw.

We too must come to understand that this world is not enough for our happiness. Like Newman "we must look beyond this world toward God, to realize His presence, to serve Him, to do His will, and to surrender oneself totally to Him, who is the sovereign Giver of all good." Newman went on to say, "the victory over the cross is ours if we but look beyond the threshold of worldliness, by submitting to the process of inner conversion, because we know it co-exists with a much higher design." And in our perseverance, we begin to discern God's Spirit guiding us, prompting us to follow His kindly Light of Truth, along the narrow path He has chosen for each one of us. You see, God always works for us. In fact He even works for those who don't work for themselves!

May God bless you all.