

St Michael's weekend & Father Chris' Farewell

Friday 1st to Sunday 3rd October 2010

Reviewed by Brian Theobald & Edmund Pike

It was known that this year our St Michael's weekend would be preceded by Pope Benedict's visit to our country. The highlight of this visit would be the beatification of Cardinal John Henry Newman. It seemed appropriate therefore that we should take Blessed John Henry Newman as the theme of our weekend and learn a little more about this man who was received into the Catholic Church about 20 miles from Sonning Common in Littlemore.

The Spiritual Family of the Work, the community that looks after The College at Littlemore, agreed to participate and help us celebrate our St Michael's weekend.

Friday 1st October

The weekend began on Friday evening with a **service of hymns, prayers and readings**, most of which were written by Cardinal Newman. The service prepared by a number of parishioners and the sisters at Littlemore was supported wonderfully by musicians, readers and choir members from within our own parish and was well attended. The theme of the evening, based on Newman's writing was 'God created me to do Him some definite service'. After a welcome by Fr Chris, Sr. Mary gave some background to Newman's life and the circumstances in which he wrote some of his best known hymns. During the course of the service we listened to a number of his prayers and writings and sang Firmly I believe and truly, Lead kindly light and Praise to the holiest. There was a time of reflection as extracts from the Dream of Gerontius were played. During the evening we not only learnt something about the thoughts and writings of Cardinal Newman, but were challenged about how we respond to God's call to 'do Him some definite service'.

Saturday 2nd October

On Saturday morning Sr. Mary, accompanied by Sr. Bianca, gave a **presentation on the life of Cardinal Newman** in the parish hall. Using a laptop and projector, images taken from some of their publications were used to illustrate some of the important times and places in Newman's life. Pictures of The College at Littlemore indicated how it has been restored to the character it had Newman's day. After a question and answer session, there was an opportunity to buy books that the sisters had brought with them and share a buffet lunch together.

Sunday 3rd October

The 10:30 Mass and the **Parish Lunch** brought our Festival of St Michael to a very enjoyable close, during which Father Chris took his leave. 25 children gathered around the altar to say the Our Father.



77 people attended the Parish Lunch, including Sisters Mary and Miriam from Littlemore. Even with some children playing outside, it was still very crowded. The tables were groaning with food from all of you, with 20 plates of savouries and salads, at least 12 different sweets and even an impressive iced cake made especially for the occasion. Father Chris said in his dismissal at Mass that he had enjoyed his stay immensely in the most co-operative and willing parish he had been in and thanked everyone. However, he said that, unusually, it didn't have an "awkward squad" - those who never agreed with you, whatever you did. He was stepping down with regret, wished us all well and hoped that we would be as kind to Father Bob.

During the Lunch, Edmund Pike, as Chairman of the Pastoral Council, handed him a card completely filled with messages from well-wishers and said that the Feast of Michaelmas was a time for rejoicing in the fruits of the harvest in preparation for winter. Likewise, we were rejoicing in the fruits which Father Chris had left us - a welcoming Church, an enthusiastic Parish, with active lay ministries and buildings in a good state of repair for the years ahead. He wished Father Chris Godspeed in Staffordshire with Cardinal Newman's benediction, "Go forth upon thy journey, Christian soul".



Father Chris replied, saying that, since his Ordination, he had endeavoured to follow St John's motto, "Zeal for my Father's household" meaning that making the Church a welcoming place was his priority, from which benefits would flow. He asked the Parish to look after Father Bob like it had looked after him. If we did that, then Father Bob would be as happy as a monkey in a jungle. Three rousing cheers followed.

Visitors are very welcome at Littlemore.

Check <http://www.newmanfriendsinternational.org> for visiting times or telephone 01865 779743.