

Archbishop Longley tells synod: ecumenism makes us better evangelisers



Archbishop Bernard Longley of Birmingham delivered the following address on Monday:

I would like to refer to art. 125 of the Instrumentum Laboris which speaks of a “renewed commitment to ecumenism” as a fruit of the Church’s own transformation. One of the insights of the Second Vatican Council was the fresh ability of the Church to recognize the work of the Holy Spirit, not only in individual Christians but also acting in and through the churches and ecclesial communities to which they belong.

The Catholic Church’s commitment to dialogue and a growing common witness with others churches and ecclesial communities must also serve the new evangelization. Authentic dialogue promotes the conversion of heart that opens us to a relationship with others where the message of the Gospel can be more clearly expressed and more fruitfully received.

There can be no effective proclamation of faith without an attempt to understand how the message is likely to be heard, how it sounds to others. That involves a profound act of listening after the example of our Lord himself. In the scriptures in a number of encounters with others he is described by the evangelist as “knowing what they were thinking” before speaking to his listeners.

That awareness of Christ precedes his teaching. It needs to be a characteristic of our teaching, insofar as we can discern under the influence of the Holy Spirit what people are thinking and present the Good News in a manner that helps it to be received.

At the same time there can be no dialogue without proclamation of our faith since dialogue is always reciprocal. The more effective and dedicated our dialogue with our brothers and sisters in other churches and ecclesial communities the more likely it is that we shall come to a comprehensive and deeper understanding of the cultures that we are sent to evangelize.

In most cities in England and Wales today there exist a multiplicity of cultures among ethnic groups living side by side. In many Catholic parishes there is no longer a dominant culture and we find African, Filipino, Vietnamese, Latin American and Anglo-Irish Catholics sometimes in equal numbers. That presents a challenge, for example in deciding what constitutes the most appropriate length of time for preaching.

On 9th October we celebrated in England the feast of Blessed John Henry Newman. He was received into the Catholic Church by Blessed Dominic Barberi, the Italian Passionist who had made England his home. Cardinal Newman was already intellectually certain of the claims of the Catholic Church but he needed to experience the holiness and the priestly ministry of Blessed Dominic before his heart was touched.

Cor ad cor loquitur – Heart speaks unto heart was more than a motto for Blessed John Henry Newman. At the deepest level he understood the people of his own time – he saw what they truly needed as well as the preoccupations that often distracted them from finding it. His *Apologia pro Vita Sua* was not only a proclamation of faith – it also described the pathway of dialogue that drew others to commit themselves more deeply to Christ.

The new evangelization is a mission that embraces all the baptized, clergy, religious and lay faithful. The laity need and deserve appropriate formation to become new evangelizers, equipped to proclaim the faith of the Church with clarity and confidence, but also secure enough in their faith to listen to and enter into dialogue with people of good will...

I am grateful that the Maryvale Institute in Birmingham is helping to equip men and women to be new evangelizers through its commitment to collaborative learning (the ecclesial equivalent of distance learning) and as a Pontifical Higher Institute of Religious Sciences.

Maryvale was Blessed John Henry Newman's first home in Birmingham. May his prayers and the example of his life together with Blessed Dominic Barberi encourage and support us in the task of new evangelization.

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