

BOOKLET TO PRINT

Saint John Henry Newman

Life, prayer, novena and pilgrimage

Feast day: October 9

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IN BRIEF

Saint John Henry Newman

Anglican priest who became a Catholic, founder of the Oratory in England, cardinal and Doctor of the Church.

Feast day	October 9
Born	February 21, 1801, London, England
Died	August 11, 1890, Edgbaston, Birmingham, England
Canonized	October 13, 2019, by Pope Francis; proclaimed Doctor of the Church in 2025
Era	19th century
Patron saint of	Catholic education, students, teachers

In this booklet

Life

Lead, Kindly Light: Prayer of Saint John Henry Newman

Novena to Saint John Henry Newman

The Birmingham Oratory, Shrine of Saint John Henry Newman

Credits and sources

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LIFE

Saint John Henry Newman

Saint John Henry Newman is one of the great intellectual and spiritual figures of the 19th century. An Anglican priest and Oxford scholar, a leader of the Oxford Movement, he became a Catholic in 1845 after a long search for the truth. He founded the Oratory of Saint Philip Neri in England, wrote major works on faith, conscience and the university, and was made a cardinal in 1879. Canonized in 2019, he is celebrated on October 9, the anniversary of his reception into the Catholic Church. Pope Leo XIV proclaimed him a Doctor of the Church in 2025.

Who was Saint John Henry Newman?

John Henry Newman was born in London on February 21, 1801, the eldest of the six children of a banker. Raised in Anglican piety and steeped in the Bible, he went through an inner conversion at the age of fifteen, during an illness. He would always regard it as decisive: a certainty of the existence of God and of his own personal relationship with him.

He entered Trinity College, Oxford, in 1817, and in 1822 became a fellow of Oriel College, then one of the intellectual centers of the university. Ordained a priest of the Church of England in 1825, he was appointed in 1828 vicar of the University Church of St Mary the Virgin, where his sermons drew crowds of students.

Key dates

- **February 21, 1801**: Born in London.
- **1816**: First conversion, at fifteen.
- **1825**: Ordained an Anglican priest.
- **1828**: Vicar of St Mary the Virgin, the University Church in Oxford.

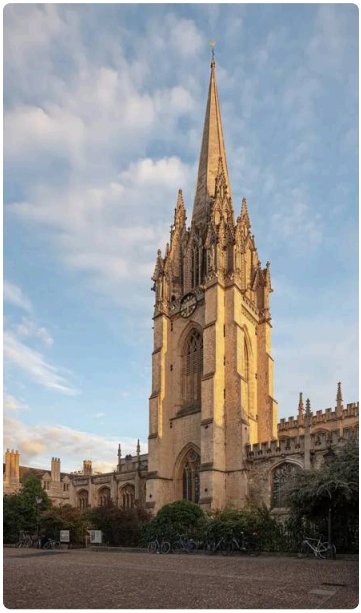
- **June 1833**: Returning from a journey in the Mediterranean, he writes "Lead, Kindly Light" at sea.
- **1833-1841**: Leads the Oxford Movement and writes many of the *Tracts for the Times*.
- **1842**: Withdraws to Littlemore, near Oxford.
- **October 9, 1845**: Received into the Catholic Church by Blessed Dominic Barberi.
- **1847**: Ordained a Catholic priest in Rome.
- **1848**: Founds the Oratory of Saint Philip Neri in England, soon settled in Birmingham.
- **1854-1858**: Rector of the Catholic University of Ireland in Dublin.
- **1864**: Publishes the *Apologia pro vita sua*.
- **1879**: Created a cardinal by Pope Leo XIII.
- **August 11, 1890**: Dies at the Birmingham Oratory.
- **September 19, 2010**: Beatified by Pope Benedict XVI in Birmingham.
- **October 13, 2019**: Canonized by Pope Francis in Rome.
- **2025**: Proclaimed a Doctor of the Church by Pope Leo XIV.

The Oxford Movement

In 1832-1833 Newman traveled around the Mediterranean. Gravely ill in Sicily, he became convinced he would not die, because he had "a work to do in England." On the voyage home, his ship was becalmed, and he wrote the poem "Lead, Kindly Light," which became one of the best-loved hymns of the English-speaking world.

Back in Oxford, he joined John Keble and Edward Pusey in a movement that sought to restore to the Church of England an awareness of its apostolic roots and of the tradition of the Fathers of the Church. The *Tracts for the Times*, short treatises largely written by Newman, had an enormous impact.

But his study of the Fathers, especially of the controversies of the 4th and 5th centuries, gradually led him to ask whether the Church of England truly stood in continuity with the early Church. Tract 90, in 1841, provoked a fierce condemnation. Newman withdrew to Littlemore, where he lived with a few friends in prayer and study.



The Church of St Mary the Virgin, Oxford, where Newman preached as Anglican vicar.

The conversion of 1845

At Littlemore, Newman wrote his *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, showing how the faith of the Church unfolds over the centuries without betraying itself. By the time he finished it, his decision was made. On the evening of October 8, 1845, he asked Father Dominic Barberi, an Italian Passionist who was passing through, to receive him. He was admitted into the Catholic Church on October 9. His conversion cost him many friendships and his position at Oxford.

Ordained a priest in Rome in 1847, he discovered the figure of Saint Philip Neri and in 1848 founded a house of the Oratory in England, soon established in the Edgbaston district of Birmingham. He spent most of the rest of his life there, between parish ministry, the school he founded and his writing.



The College at Littlemore, near Oxford, where Newman was received into the Catholic Church in 1845.

Educator and writer

From 1854 to 1858 Newman was rector of the new Catholic University of Ireland in Dublin. His lectures there became *The Idea of a University*, a classic on the formation of the mind. In 1864, publicly accused of insincerity by the writer Charles Kingsley, he replied with the *Apologia pro vita sua*, the story of his religious journey, which won back the respect of his fellow countrymen. There followed *The Dream of Gerontius* (1865), a poem on death and judgment, and *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (1870), a reflection on how we reach certainty in faith.

Long viewed with suspicion in some Catholic circles, he was created a cardinal in 1879 by Leo XIII, without being a bishop. He chose as his motto *Cor ad cor loquitur*, "Heart speaks to heart." He died in Birmingham on August 11, 1890. On his memorial he had inscribed: *Ex umbris et imaginibus in veritatem*, "Out of shadows and images into the truth."



Cardinal John Henry Newman, by John Everett Millais (1881).

Why is Saint John Henry Newman a patron of Catholic education?

Newman spent his life teaching: as an Oxford tutor and preacher, as rector of the Catholic University in Dublin, and as founder of a school in Birmingham. He wanted educated Christians, able to give an account of their faith, and he defended the unity of intellect and faith. That is why he is invoked for

students, teachers and Catholic schools and universities. Across the English-speaking world, many Catholic chaplaincies on secular campuses are known as "Newman Centers" in his honor.

He is also the saint of the honest search for truth and of fidelity to conscience, which he called, in his *Letter to the Duke of Norfolk* (1875), "the aboriginal Vicar of Christ." His holiness was made of patience, friendship, intellectual work and humble parish service. People pray to him for those who are seeking faith and for those who feel misunderstood.

Symbols and how to recognize Saint John Henry Newman in art

Newman is usually shown as an elderly cardinal in red, as in the famous portrait by John Everett Millais (1881), or as a younger cleric in Oxford dress. A book or pen recalls the writer and teacher. His motto, *Cor ad cor loquitur*, often accompanies his image.

To pray with him, read the prayer "Lead, Kindly Light", or follow the novena to Saint John Henry Newman, from September 30 to October 8.

Where to pray to Saint John Henry Newman

- **Birmingham** (England): the Birmingham Oratory, which he founded and where his shrine is located.
- **Littlemore** (Oxford): the College, where he was received into the Catholic Church.
- **Oxford**: the University Church of St Mary the Virgin, where he preached.
- **Dublin**: the University Church, which he had built for the Catholic University.

PRAYER

Lead, Kindly Light: Prayer of Saint John Henry Newman

"Lead, Kindly Light" is the best-known prayer of John Henry Newman. It is a poem he wrote on June 16, 1833, while still an Anglican, on a ship becalmed between Corsica and Sardinia, on his way home from a journey during which he had nearly died. Set to music, it became a much-loved hymn throughout the English-speaking world. Here is the original text, followed by an original prayer to Saint John Henry Newman.

"Lead, Kindly Light" (1833)

Lead, Kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,
Lead Thou me on!
The night is dark, and I am far from home,
Lead Thou me on!
Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see
The distant scene; one step enough for me.

I was not ever thus, nor prayed that Thou
Shouldst lead me on;
I loved to choose and see my path; but now
Lead Thou me on!
I loved the garish day, and, spite of fears,
Pride ruled my will. Remember not past years!

So long Thy power hath blest me, sure it still
Will lead me on.
O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till
The night is gone,
And with the morn those angel faces smile,
Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile!

Source: John Henry Newman, "The Pillar of the Cloud," dated June 16, 1833, published in *Lyra Apostolica* (1836) and in *Verses on Various Occasions* (1868). Public domain.

A word to meditate on

> *"God has created me to do Him some definite service; He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another. I have my mission."*

Source: meditation of March 7, 1848, published after his death in *Meditations and Devotions* (1893).

Prayer to Saint John Henry Newman

> *Saint John Henry Newman, you sought the truth with patience, through study, prayer and friendship, and you followed it when it cost you so much: pray for me.*
>
> *When the night is dark and I cannot see where I am going, teach me to ask only for light for the next step. When I doubt, keep me faithful to my conscience, enlightened by faith.*
>
> *You taught, preached and served the poor of your parish: I entrust to you students, teachers, those who are seeking God and those who feel misunderstood. I also entrust to you my intention (name it in silence).*
>
> *May my heart speak to the heart of God, and may I one day pass with you out of shadows and images into the fullness of truth. Amen.*

This prayer is an original text by Saintspedia, free to use for personal and community prayer.

When to pray this prayer

- On his feast day, October 9, the anniversary of his reception into the Catholic Church in 1845.

- When you face a decision and cannot see the way ahead.
- For students before exams, and for teachers at the start of a school year.
- For a friend or relative who is searching for faith.
- When fidelity to your conscience costs you something.

For a longer time of prayer, follow the novena to Saint John Henry Newman, and discover the life of Saint John Henry Newman.

NOVENA

Novena to Saint John Henry Newman

This novena is an original composition by Saintspedia, inspired by the life and writings of Saint John Henry Newman. It is not an official liturgical text. To finish it on the eve of his feast, begin on September 30; it ends on October 8, the day on which, in 1845, Newman asked to be received into the Catholic Church. His feast follows on October 9. You can also pray it at any time of year, for yourself or for someone who is searching for the truth.

How to pray this novena

Each day, entrust your intention to God, read the meditation, say the prayer of the day, then an Our Father. The phrases attributed to Newman are faithful paraphrases of his thought unless they appear in quotation marks. The small act suggested for each day helps carry the prayer into ordinary life. If you miss a day, simply continue where you left off.

Day 1: God and my soul

At fifteen, Newman realized that for him there were two beings whose reality was luminously clear: God and himself. Faith begins with this personal relationship. Before being a set of ideas, it is a meeting with Someone who knows us.

Prayer: Lord, you know me by name. Make me more and more aware of your presence, in the quiet of my heart and in the events of my day.

Today: Take five minutes of silence to place yourself before God, without asking for anything.

Day 2: One step enough for me

In "Lead, Kindly Light," Newman does not ask to see the distant scene. He asks only for light for the next step. We often want to understand everything before we move; God usually gives us just enough light for today.

Prayer: Kindly Light, lead me on. I do not ask to see everything, only to take today's step with trust.

Today: Do the small thing you know is right, without waiting to understand the whole picture.

Day 3: Seeking the truth

For years Newman studied the Fathers of the Church to discover where the truth lay. He was not afraid that the truth might lead him somewhere he had not planned to go. His honesty of mind was itself a form of prayer.

Prayer: Spirit of truth, give me an upright heart that seeks and is willing to be led.

Today: Read a page from one of the Fathers of the Church or from the Catechism.

Day 4: Conscience

For Newman, conscience is the voice of God within us, "the aboriginal Vicar of Christ." It is not a matter of personal preference; it must be listened to, formed and enlightened.

Prayer: Lord, enlighten my conscience and give me the courage to obey it.

Today: Make a sincere examination of conscience, and if you can, go to confession soon.

Day 5: The cost of fidelity

His conversion in 1845 cost him friendships, his career at Oxford and the understanding of some of his family. He still chose to follow what he believed to be true, without bitterness toward those who could not follow him.

Prayer: Lord, help me to be faithful to you even when it costs me, without hardening my heart toward those who do not understand me.

Today: Pray for someone with whom you disagree.

Day 6: I have my mission

"God has created me to do Him some definite service." Every life, even a hidden one, has its unique place in God's plan. No one else can do exactly what God has entrusted to you.

Prayer: Lord, I believe you have given me a mission. Help me to recognize it and to fulfill it, day by day.

Today: Thank God for a service you are able to render each day, however small.

Day 7: Heart speaks to heart

As a cardinal, Newman chose the motto *Cor ad cor loquitur*, "Heart speaks to heart." Prayer is a conversation of heart to heart, and faith is often passed on through friendship rather than argument.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to speak to you heart to heart, and to speak of you with gentleness.

Today: Write a note of friendship to someone who matters in your life.

Day 8: Forming the mind

Rector in Dublin and founder of a school in Birmingham, Newman wanted educated Christians, able to give an account of their faith. For him, faith and reason were never enemies.

Prayer: Lord, bless pupils, students and those who teach them. Unite in them intelligence and faith.

Today: Pray for a teacher, or encourage a student you know.

Day 9: Out of shadows into the truth

On his memorial, Newman had these words inscribed: "Out of shadows and images into the truth." The whole Christian life is this passage toward the light of God, which we see now only in part.

Prayer: Lord, at the end of this novena I entrust my intention to you. Through the intercession of Saint John Henry Newman, lead me out of shadows into your full light. Amen.

Today: Go to Mass or spend some time in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament.

Closing prayer

Saint John Henry Newman, you followed the kindly Light amid the encircling gloom. I entrust to you the intention of these nine days. Pray for those who seek the truth, for those who teach, and for the unity of Christians. Obtain for us the grace to take, each day, the step that God asks of us. Amen.

To go further: the life of Saint John Henry Newman and the prayer "Lead, Kindly Light".

PILGRIMAGE

The Birmingham Oratory, Shrine of Saint John Henry Newman

The Birmingham Oratory, in the Edgbaston district, is the house that John Henry Newman founded and where he lived for nearly forty years, until his death in 1890. Its church now houses the shrine of Saint John Henry Newman, the main place of pilgrimage dedicated to him.

A house of Saint Philip Neri in England

After his ordination in Rome in 1847, Newman received from Pope Pius IX the mission of establishing in England the Congregation of the Oratory, founded in the 16th century by Saint Philip Neri. The community settled in Birmingham in 1848, first in the city center, then, from 1852, in Edgbaston, on Hagley Road. Newman exercised his priestly ministry here, founded a school, and wrote most of his great works. He died here on August 11, 1890.



The Birmingham Oratory, in Edgbaston.

Newman's church and shrine

The present Oratory church, dedicated to the Immaculate Conception, was built in the early 20th century in Newman's memory, in a style inspired by Roman basilicas. After his beatification in 2010, a shrine was dedicated to him in the church. Newman had been buried in the cemetery of the Oratory's country house at Rednal; at the exhumation in 2008, no significant remains were found, and the items recovered were placed in the shrine. The house also preserves his room and his library.

Praying at the Oratory

Before your visit, you can reread the life of Saint John Henry Newman, or a few pages of the *Apologia pro vita sua*. On site, a time of silence at the shrine lets you entrust an intention, for example for a student or someone seeking

faith. The prayer "Lead, Kindly Light" suits this moment well. These suggestions are offered by Saintspedia.

Other places of Newman

- **Littlemore** (Oxford): the "College," where he lived from 1842 to 1846 and was received into the Catholic Church on October 9, 1845.
- **Oxford**: the University Church of St Mary the Virgin, where he preached as an Anglican vicar, and Oriel College.
- **Rednal** (near Birmingham): the Oratory's country house, where his grave was located.
- **Dublin**: the University Church, on St Stephen's Green, which he had built for the Catholic University.
- **London**: the Brompton Oratory, founded by members of his community, in front of which his statue stands.

Practical information

The Oratory is in Edgbaston, west of central Birmingham, on Hagley Road, reached by bus or on foot from the center. October 9, his feast day, and August 11, the anniversary of his death, are favored dates for a pilgrimage. Check Mass times and visiting arrangements with the Oratory before you come.

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