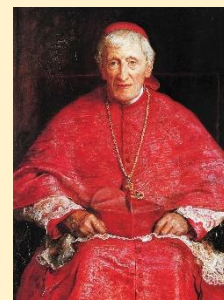


Last Thursday was the feast day of St John Paul II (1920-2005), and earlier in the month the Church, especially in England, celebrated the feast day of St John Henry Cardinal Newman (1801-1890). The two saints, although separated by over 100 years and shaped by very different cultures, shared many gifts. Both were philosophers, theologians, poets and writers, Newman of novels, and John Paul II, of plays.



One idea, in particular, that they both spoke of often, was ‘personal vocation’, that the Christian life is an on-going dialogue between God and the individual in which a person discerns the meaning and purpose of his or her life. What lies behind this idea is Scripture which throughout recounts God calling men and women, beginning with the call of Abraham, and complementing this, St Paul’s teaching on the Church as the Body of Christ, with each member uniquely gifted by the Spirit for the good of all.

An example of Newman speaking of God’s on-going personal call is found in a sermon from his Church of England days: “We are not called once only. All through our life Christ is calling us. Christ works through our natural faculties, and circumstances-of-life. What happens to us in providence is, in all essential respects, what His voice was to those whom he addressed when on earth.”

John Paul II In *Love and Responsibility*, published in 1960, wrote that vocation has a “personal and psychological” dimension which entails that “there is a proper course for everyone’s development to follow, a specific way in which a person commits their whole life to the service of certain values.”

Thirty years later in a Post Synodal document, John Paul II spoke of the guidance that is due to each person to help them discern their calling in life because “God with his call reaches the heart of each individual, and the Spirit, who abides deep within each disciple, gives himself to each Christian with different charisms and special signs.” John Paul II understood that there was a genuine sense in which God’s call was ongoing. “God, who called a couple to marriage, continues to call a couple *in* marriage.”

For both Newman and John Paul II the on-going discernment of God’s calling leads to true community. The more we are attuned to our calling in life, the more we are a companion to our neighbour.

*Fr David Willis op*